



The Disillusioned African

Francis B. Nyamnjoh

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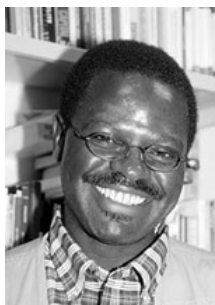
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Francis B. Nyamnjoh is Associate Professor and Head of Publications and Dissemination with the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). He has taught sociology, anthropology and communication studies at universities in Cameroon, Botswana and South Africa, and has researched and written extensively on Cameroon and Botswana, where he was awarded the "Senior Arts Researcher of the Year" prize for 2003. His most recent books include *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity* (Brill, 2003), *Rights and the Politics of Recognition in Africa* (Zed Books, 2004), *Africa's Media, Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* (Zed Books, 2005), *Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa* (CODESRIA/ZED Books, 2006). Dr. Nyamnjoh has published widely on globalisation, citizenship, media and the politics of identity in Africa. He has published two other novels, *Mind Searching* (1991) and *A Nose for Money* (2006), a play, *The Convert* (2003), and *Stories from Abakwa* (2007). The *Disillusioned African* was first published in 1995 by Nooremac Press (Limbe, Cameroon).

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Twelve years after it was first published, *The Disillusioned African* continues to speak to present-day predicaments. It is a remarkably prescient novel, one that demands no benefit of hindsight from its reader. The African is not simply disillusioned, both now and then. On the contrary, *The Disillusioned African* shows, both now and then, how disillusion stimulates creative energy in the African, forever alert to the evils of servitude and victimhood.

In order to understand its current significance, *The Disillusioned African* must be seen in the historical context of its creation. The first half of the 1990s was an exhilarating period in Africa. Often seen as the second liberation, the democratization that swept the continent brought auspicious constitutional and economic reforms in its wake. The number of political protests increased dramatically from 1990 onwards, followed by unprecedented guarantees of basic political liberties. During the first half of the 1990s, the number of African countries holding competitive legislative elections more than quadrupled to 38 out of the 47 countries in the sub-Saharan region. By 1994, not a single *de jure* one-party state remained in Africa.

Why disillusion? The African was unlikely to be surprised to discover that the *de jure* was different from the *de facto*. Colonial contrivances had etched on social memory the ever-present possibility that things are not what they seem to be. Disillusion, this novel shows, is essential to the creative tension that keeps Africa on the move, for only an Afro-pessimist would claim that the more things change in Africa, the more they stay the same.

Africa is on the move not only through its political ferment but also, quite literally, through migration, no less now than when *The Disillusioned African* was first written. Disillusion can become despair for those who seek a slice of the cake their forefathers helped Europe to bake. Some of them lose their lives even before they have found a big enough hole in the fortress to smuggle themselves in. Others, such as the protagonist in this novel, have qualifications to offer and a thirst for further education but find that their degrees and diplomas entitle them to little else than a job at the BBC (British Bottom Cleaners). Add to this the need for new enemies in the New World Order and the foresight of *The Disillusioned African* seems almost uncanny. 'People are united', our narrator observes long before 9/11, 'more by fear than by love'.

It is in the protagonist's eventual break with the conditions of his disillusion that we get the clearest indication of disillusion's creative potentials. The much-travelled philosopher submits himself to the philosopher-peasant. A populist reversal of roles, perhaps, but also one that conveys careful consideration of what has kept the African disillusioned. The insight that emerges is made virtually timeless by the infinite ways in which a sense of intellectual and cultural inferiority informs the self-image among those Africans who deride their less educated compatriots. Disillusion, fomented at the heart of European hypocrisy, carries the promise of another future.

Francis Nyamnjoh has consistently avoided, here and elsewhere, the sociological abstractions of tradition and modernity that have too often stifled literary expression in and about Africa. Just as philosophers and peasants enter a dialogue in *The Disillusioned Africa*, so too have Nyamnjoh's more recent writings explored relationships between apparently separate worlds. *The Convert*, for example, offers a remarkably subtle perspective on the mundane problems that drive young Africans to new forms of charismatic Christianity. *A Nose for Money*, in turn, looks at salient social distinctions -

village and city, women and men – through the lenses of consumerism.

These distinctions recall others in *The Disillusioned African*, such as between Europe and Africa, philosophers and peasants. In this literary aesthetic, distinctions are not mutually exclusive alternatives. By attending to their creative tensions, Nyamnjoh takes his readers back to the future.

Harri Englund

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July 2007

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Some time ago, in 1993, a forum of anglophone Cameroon writers held under the auspices of the Goethe Institute of Yaounde produced, among many excellent articles, a reflection by Tatah H. Mbuy on "The Moral Responsibility of the Writer in a Pluralist Society". Every such writer, says Mbuy, is to see himself as a spokesman for his society. He must seek the truth, propagate it and defend it. He is to be the prophet and soothsayer of his society, pricking the consciences of all and trying to correct faults where these are to be found. Elsewhere in this forum other participants described present-day anglophone writing as concerned with "deconstructing victimhood", through a discourse revolving around shared values or reference points. This also entails the need to move on, into *reconstruction* of heritage that Cameroonians, and indeed all Africans, are clinging to precariously, in the pluralist era of Africa's democratisation.

It is in the new, post-election scene, which Nyamnjoh has described elsewhere as "a decline to one-dimensionalism", that "The Disillusioned African" takes his bearings on the world. Its framework is the ongoing politico-economic process of the 1990's with its own peculiarly African 'fin-de-siècle' flavour, seen from the distancing haven of an

imaginary trip to Britain. The vehicle of communication is the letters of the philosopher-hero to his friend Mounjo back home. The air-flight and touch-down, the first sight of London, the brief stay in academic Manchester, and an interlude in hospital, laid low with malaria, provide the author with a variety of jumping-off points from which to view both British society and his own. Part One, situated in the "Mandela Hotel", evokes reflections on leadership, class systems and the universal greed for wealth - or what may be called "officially-sponsored theft". Part Two provides much paradoxical comment on the foibles and attitude of what Nyamnjoh refers to throughout as the "Queendom" of Britain. Part Three chronicles life as the only student of a university department of philosophy, bringing in its train wry observations on the ambiguous cross-cultural influences that followed in the wake of colonisation and including an appalling, scarcely credible specimen of official memoranda from the Belgian government to the departing missionaries to what is now Zaire. From his hospital ward in Part Four, the narrator muses on the demise of Communist autocracies and their effects on the world balance of power: "Today, people have got to find new enemies, which isn't easy... The truth is, people have simply got to have something they fear, for

people are united more by FEAR than by LOVE." After drawing a parallel between leftist dictatorships such as that of the Ceauscus, and the present modes of government of various African leaders, the book takes a helter-skelter, tumble-down freefall to the present day, to the chicanery of the 1992 Cameroon elections, and the hero's flight from the central critical arena into his native Grasslands village. The book was written before the accession to power of Nelson Mandela, the Rwandan genocide or the depredations of devaluation in the economies of francophone Africa could provide further examples of both the best and the worst scenarios for a problematic future.

Satirical writing has an honourable history among anglophone Cameroonians, whose use of language as a political instrument is as powerful as any polemicist in nineteenth century England. Readers of Nyamnjoh's previous work have grown to expect, beneath the racy, humorous style, an incisive and merciless analysis of social ills. Here is indeed a seeker after truth. However, where the previous book, *Mind Searching*, adopted the light-hearted and hilarious device of an extended daydream taking place in church, as a vehicle for his observation of the Yaounde bureaucratic and religious scene, this work seems to fish in murkier waters altogether. By

the medium of an apparent, tongue-in-cheek naivety, by repeated digressions and diverse literary and historical parallels, Nyamnjoh's subversive intent remains constant: to strip pretensions, to explode phoneyess and humbug, to expose the sores that underlie the veneer of Africa modernity, particularly among the elites and their sad counterparts, the underclasses. The vigour of expression reveals the bitterness that underpins the author's surface urbanity:

The African elite today loves kingly life so much that, at independence, what mattered to him most was political power, not economic power. The economic power was largely retained by the Europeans and expatriates, which is why the leaders suck the peasants like ticks in order to sustain their kingly appetites. Had the African leaders been sensible enough to think seriously of economic power as well, African countries today would certainly not be this dependent upon the unmechanised efforts of the peasants. And they would also be in a position to carry out their own development efforts,

without necessarily posing as
"les Mendiants du monde".
"Beggars of the world, unite,"
Marx is likely to have written,
had he been born in Africa."

As he remarks elsewhere: "Nothing
man-made is neutral, and this includes
language..."

A counterpart to the African dimension
is the book's extended commentary on life in
the UK. Here is no innocent anthropologist.
Charles's uproarious tour of London, in the
company of those unlikely twins, Thompson
and Thompson, and compared by him to
circumcision or an initiation rite, occasions a
mixed bag of comments on the British world
view. A few well-worn themes come up for
comment: the behaviour of the British on
trains; the national meal of fish-and-chips; and,
inevitably, the weather:

"The sun has not shone since I
arrived in this Queendom but
the English say this is the best
summer they've had in
decades."

Many in his host country would share
his reaction to instant foods, to the paradoxical
attempts on both sides of the racial divide to
change the colour of one's skin. Though they
might be puzzled by other assertions, such as
the inferiority of the Queendom's methods of

washing-up, or the supposed inability of its subjects to dance? No doubt many a Dark Continental visitor will have suffered the same frustration at the Western doctor's ignorance of malaria; even in the "Hospital for Tropical Diseases." Better not to go in the first place, but to stick with the traditional healers!

Keba, like many other tourists, is ambivalent about Britain; not without his own 'idées reçues'. At times, indeed he could be regarded as throwing the baby out with the bathwater: when, for example, he deplores the impact on Africa of Western education, or is disgusted by the publicity methods of aid agencies launching Third World disaster funds. In his search for inconsistencies, everything is grist to Charles's mill; but one cannot be a universal sender-up without falling at times into inconsistencies of one's own.

In the wide spectrum of contemporary anglophone writing Nyamnjoh's genre stands somewhere between the sardonic humour of the political lampoonist and the anguished cry of prophecy. Bernard Fonlon, in his open letter to African students, declares:

"Still I persist in the belief that it is necessary, even imperative, that at least some intellectuals should steel their will and brace themselves and enter the arena

of politics in order to usher in and further though and conscience and righteousness and integrity in the conduct of public affairs."

Is Charles's withdrawal, at the end of the book, into his Menchum peasant community an admission of defeat, or a case of '*reculer pour mieux sauter*'? Is there hope for the future? Does Nyamnjoh, in the terms of his fellow-authors quoted above, provide any ways forward to the reconstruction of the African heritage? Coming as it does at a moment of even greater economic peril, political passivity and mendacious propaganda than that prevailing at the beginning of the story, one is bound to say that the vision is indeed sombre, the sense of despondency profound.

Yet this is a fighting literature and the analysis of victimhood is not wholly pessimistic. As witness the final, dream-letter from Keba to Mounjo's wife:

"What we are witnessing are the signs of a crumbling system, one deaf and blind to the needs and wishes of our people. One in which the stomach has for thirty years been the only political compass. The violence and bloodshed show the tyrant as

cornered and desperate, and with a little more effort and coordination on our part, tyranny would have met its Waterloo. Whenever the rays of change do at last penetrate the darkening thickness of our suffocating jungles, it shall be the result of a massive all-involving effort, the fruit of our collective suffering."

Whatever the imagined future for Africa, this courageous book will certainly provide, for both its foreign readers and the young generation of Cameroonians, a provocative insight into the complex web of despair, frustration, paradox and hope that, on the eve of the twenty-first century, constitutes the "downtrodden and forgotten bulk of the Darkened Continent."

One such young man, recently encountered in the North-West province, voiced his surprised discovery, rapidly growing into a conviction, that the liberation of Africa was not, as he had always thought, a process that would come upon it from outside, but a deep transformation to be wrought by each one from within.

To all who have Africa's interests at heart, the heartfelt cry of "*The Disillusioned*

African” will come as a powerful incentive to set about the task of ‘redeeming the time’ and, whether from without or from within, of building a better future for the Continent.

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PART ONE

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Dear Mouno,
Forgive my lack of a permanent address at the moment. But I thought I should fulfil my promise to write as soon as I arrived in London. You may therefore not bother about an immediate reply to this letter. But do remember to reply when you eventually have my address, which, if all goes well, should be in my next letter. Never forget the golden rule that one good turn deserves another. Perhaps you need a reminder at this level: It was Jesus Christ himself, one of the earliest social thinkers, who prescribed this particular philosophy of life. Probably when he remarked that far too many people in his time were taking advantage of the generosity and tolerance of others, he climbed to the top of Mount Calvary and proclaimed: "Behold you shall do unto others as you would have them do unto you." I guess that by some divine magic he had hoped the world would change overnight! Philosophers always do, don't they? But I wish he were present today to see just how much of a deaf ear the whole wide world has lent to his philosophy. I'm sure you, who like rushing to conclusions, would immediately infer that this is a pointer to the "fact" that people are ordinarily not

philosophical. I would rather take a more cautious stance; that people are constantly seeking to infuse into others strange ideas of themselves as superior beings.

To illustrate my point, I would use two examples. Remember Julius Caesar? I trust your knowledge of history. He is said to have forged an identity for himself as one who came, saw and conquered. Isn't that outright aggression - to have come uninvited, seen unauthorized and conquered unprovoked? And would you say that he was "ordinarily not philosophical?" No! Moungo. On the contrary, Caesar's behaviour proved him to be as philosophical as anyone else would be. Only his philosophy happened to be different from Christ's. He simply had no patience with a world that failed to distinguish between the weak and the powerful, the cowardly and the valiant or between others and Caesar. How do you think Caesar would have formulated a philosophy to suit his world view? "Brush aside every impediment on your climb to prominence, and make sure you destroy the ladder that helps you up," is my guess.

I know you would start saying to yourself "Charles for sure has read Machiavelli, the pawn of the devil!" Forgive me if it so seems. But I can provide you with countless examples of illiterate individuals who have been more Machiavellian than

Machiavelli himself would ever have been had he mistakenly caught the reins of absolute power. What makes Machiavelli's prescriptions sound so devilish is nothing but the fact that unlike others, he doesn't see why princes and politicians of the world should continue to pretend to be respectful and considerate towards the weak and the forsaken of the earth. As a girl told me once when I tried to tell her what a nice chap I was, "Charles, stop lying to me. As far as I'm concerned, all men are mean, only some succeed better than others in hiding the fact that they are." How right she was! Anyway, because of lack of time, permit me to give my second illustration straightaway. (Remember that you have the freedom to slip Machiavellianism back into the agenda when you reply in due course.)

My next illustration is a belaboured issue, so I beseech you to bear with me for want of a better example. Can you recall the first time Europeans convinced themselves that Africans were fools, inferiors and monkeys? That was when Capitalism was beginning to take shape, and slaves sold like tea and coffee would be here in the heart of winter. African kings raided one another's villages for slaves in "a hellish competition of bloody cruelty." And I daresay the Europeans were right to think the way they did. For how can you imagine that benevolent African kings accepted rifles

without gunpowder or gunpowder technology, in exchange for hundreds of their subjects who were taken away to make numerous sacrifices so that Capitalism might germinate and flourish? What use were thousands of rifles without as much as a pint of gunpowder? Who do you think was most likely to win a slave-war: the European with a single rifle and all the gunpowder, or an African king with a hundred rifles but no gunpowder? The answer, my dear Moungo, is flying in the air.

The Europeans succeeded in “infusing into Africans strange ideas of themselves as superior beings”. For how would you, by any stretch of the imagination, see a king exchange a subject or two or three, for a mere looking-glass? “Whose fault?” the question is bound to crop up. And many are bound to bleat: “The African king’s,” like sheep, before stopping to think. But a second question is necessary. Would the African king have accepted a looking-glass in exchange for human beings had the European not deceived him into thinking that there was nothing wrong with that? Or had the European not taken advantage of the king’s fascination with novelties or technological and military inferiority? Furthermore, in a situation of total lack of communication, who can say with certainty that the African king actually

understood why the European was taking his people away? If you would remind yourself that 70 per cent and more of Africans still can't communicate in the different European languages, despite the length of time taken to enforce them politically, you are well placed to imagine how unavoidable misunderstanding was in those early days of contact, where the prevalent language was that of signs, or "le dialogue des sourds," in French diplomatic parlance. Thus, knowing how desperate the Europeans were to avoid giving a stillbirth to Capitalism, there is every reason to think that if they gave any reason at all, it must have been a phoney one.

Suppose, just suppose we admit it was entirely the African king's fault, that he was indeed interested in selling his subjects, and that he used slavery to dispose of his rivals. What do the proponents of this thesis want us to believe? That the African king was intelligent enough to decide what to do, that he knew his self-interests, and that he had the right and independence to choose to support slavery or not. It is good to be conscious of others' intelligence, abilities and rights, but even better to respect them. I congratulate whoever does both. But why is it that those who argue for the African king's intelligence and freedom of choice in the matter of slavery decline to put forth the same argument for

intelligent choice regarding colonialism, where some African kings refused to collude? Why was the same intelligent and responsible African king all of a sudden seen as unfit for independence? I should imagine you haven't forgotten the ignominious treatment of Emperor Haile Selassie, when the Ethiopians dared to remind Europe of these rights by humiliating the Italians at Adowa? Remember that he was chased out of Addis Ababa and forced to abandon his throne, and go abegging for help in Europe and at the League of Nations; and that he was as successful as the man in the Bible who prayed to God for rain in the heart of the dry season, so that his neighbours might realise just how much God loved him more than He did them. Equally, this issue of double standards brings back to mind the pathetic case of the Koreans, who despite a 500-year history of self-government, saw their country sliced into two, "because they were incapable of self-government" after a brief 36 years of colonialism under the Japanese! To argue with me on this, you must do more than bleat: "The dominated are invariably defined by those who dominate them!"

Please Moungo, forgive my devious-mindedness. I easily get carried away by my reflections. Perhaps it's too much philosophy. Sometimes I wonder why I've

spent all these years reading philosophy. The more I read, the more frustrated I get. It is bad to be ignorant, but dangerous to know overmuch. Often I've wondered whether I wouldn't be better off with scales over my eyes and wax in my ears! I suffer more in my knowledge than others do in their ignorance. You should recall my late great-uncle. I envied him so! He was born blind, and became deaf at an early age. So he never had to bother about the evils of sight or the harsh cacophonies of oppression that storm my ears daily. Yet, he lives no more; ample proof perhaps, that ours isn't a world for the innocent, the pure and the harmless. Theirs is the world hereafter, which in turn, is sure to displease the henchmen of the devil that we all are! Heaven is for those to whom life on earth has been hell, so the Bible claims.

Anyway, that's that. Let's jolly well come back to where I began before I fell over the cliff. Yes, you should forgive my present lack of a permanent address. I would rather write you now than wait until I know not when, for an address. This is partly because my first impressions are quite volatile, and may disappear if I fail to write them down without delay. You may recall that the main reason why I failed to become the writer I have always wanted to be, is that, each time I caught and caged a bright idea in my dreams, I woke

up in the morning only to realise that it had clawed open my feeble memory and escaped. You may want to know why I can't write them down somewhere and wait until I have an address, then copy them out. To that, my answer is, you should shut up, for I don't have all the time to do the same piece of work twice. So don't you dare question me. You must remember that I'm a philosopher, and as such, devote most of my time to philomeditations. Only in this way, I hope, can you avoid asking silly questions, or expecting more than I can offer even to a good friend. Let's start from the very beginning. Did you see me off at the airport? I can't remember, but for the benefit of the doubt, I take it you did not. For I'm more inclined to believe that you downed too much beer the night before than could allow you out of bed in time to see off a friend on his way to amass authority in Philosophy. That should be the case. I can still see you, already drunk when I was barely on my first glass of King Size, Friend-Of-The-Dismembered, Brainwasher-Of-The-Dispossessed, Manawa or whatever. It is apparent you even declined eating with us the food your wife had prepared to grace my departure. You must have been saved only by the fact of being in your house, with no driving-home to do. It would be a blatant lie to say I disapprove of your drinking, if for no reason other than when

something is as widespread as drunkenness is in Cameroon, right-thinking people stop blaming individuals, and begin to track down the sinister forces that make a virtue of the vice. So for now, you are free to be unfree. However, I would like you to tell me more about that last evening we spent together. Things aren't so clear to me any more, though I have only been here for a week. Perhaps I was drunk myself, not on beer though, but on thoughts about discovering the galloping West. Yes, thoughts of pace-setting Europe must have made me drunk. If not, what accounts for my sudden loss of memory? God forbid that I've already caught the forgetting syndrome, for which Africans are well reputed. No! It can't be! You know it can't be, don't you?

I remember joking to Monique your wife, that once here, I would ask to be taken to the tree of Liberty, Democracy and Capitalism, where I could harvest and eat some of its succulent fruits in order to be liberated, tolerated and enriched. Today, barely a week after my arrival in 'The Free World', I am very grateful she took it for a joke. Else I would be utterly embarrassed pleading to withdraw my words, and trying hard to differentiate between reality and illusion.

Since you did not accompany me to the airport, I will start my tale at the airport in our

“economic capital,” Douala. The appellation forcibly brings to mind what a loathed critic once said, probably under the influence of Shaa, the famous ‘knockout’ brew of peasant origin. According to this bizarre but lucid critic, a country might think it its pride to talk of an economic capital. Hardly do those who say this realise the mess which they imply their country’s economy is in. It means the country has failed to make economic development a nationwide issue, and has concentrated all industrial activities in one city, as if that city could adequately serve as the breadbasket for the entire population. I remember the critic said something about “developing the Centre to the detriment of the Periphery.” Now, I’m ready to challenge this critic to show me any country in the world where there is no difference between the centre and the periphery.

Take this Queendom as a case in point. Would you imagine that politicians and academics here are equally preoccupied with the issue of some sort of North-South divide, whereby London and the other major cities are generally thought to owe their relative economic advancement to the economic dis-advancement of the rest of the Queendom? Or where nationally, the price for England’s economic advancement is thought to be the economic dis-advancement of Scotland, Wales

and Northern Ireland? Yet Britain stands unopposed as the world's most urbanised country, and also as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution! Don't you agree that it is about time we asked all critics to have their feet firmly on the ground? They would do themselves an awful lot of good, by understanding the simple truth that Man, like *Oliver Twist*, is always wanting more, but that the limited amount of resources in every country and in the world, makes it impossible for one person or nation to have more, without depriving others of their fair share, or, as we would say in philosophy, giving Charles Darwin the last laugh.

The take-off was successful! We congratulated the pilot. More so when some of us learnt he was black - backward, so to speak. There is the famous story of a prominent African leader who was so madly in love with Europe that he would fly here to lunch, wine and dine in ten-star hotels, or to dry-clean his suits and buy cancer-free cigarettes, then fly back to continue with the arduous but prestigious task of purging the masses of "Ignorance" and making them contribute in the chase after "Civilisation" through "Nation-moulding". It is said that whenever this leader (who was more European than any European has succeeded in being for the past century and half) had a successful flight, he

would ask to be presented to the pilot, whom he congratulated. As it happened, these pilots were so invariably white that he had virtually become addicted to congratulating white pilots.

One day, as his friend and mentor the mischievous Devil would have it, after a routine lunch and dinner with men of import in the best hotel in London, he boarded a plane to fly back home and resume the task of overseeing the slow but steady march forward by his less fortunate countrymen. At the end of what he termed a most consummate flight (his English, it was rumoured by those who knew him well, was almost better than the Queen's), he decided not only to give the pilot "the congratulatory handshake," but to crown it all by offering the pilot some money, as further expression of his paternal satisfaction. Like many of his counterparts in the Dark Continent, our leader's problem was and remains spending money, not appropriating it. Remember Samir Amin's description of the elite African as someone who progressively takes on the look of a stranger in his own country due to his daily lifestyle modelled on that of *homo consumens universalis*?

As usual, the leader asked to be taken to the pilot. But when he was shown a black person, he simply wouldn't believe he was being shown the pilot. So he got annoyed and

asked to be driven home in his limousine, mad with the crew for pulling his leg, and threatening to see to it that they were fired accordingly by their airline in which he owned more than 21 per cent of the shares under a pseudonym. Poor crew! Why did they not tell His Magnificence what he sought to hear? That could at least have saved them their jobs. Poor victims, perhaps they learnt their lesson and are surely going to behave more cautiously next time. The sooner they realise that some leaders are just like babies, constantly needing pampering and in love with fantasy, the better for them.

Maybe you know the leader in question? Keep his name to yourself if you do, for we must demonstrate that like our leaders, we stick most respectfully to the rules of decent behaviour, which we imbibed during the good old days of pious colonialism.

Back to my flight: the take-off was superb. I enjoyed it, and wish our economic take-off would be just as good, whenever it chooses to come. Do you share my feeling that we appear to have waited too long for this prescribed take-off? I wonder when it will show its face. Perhaps it never will. Maybe it was just a passing illusion, a mirage, some sort of false hope to keep us tethered to the cord of exploitation. Perhaps we should have used our eyes and ears right from the start, when the

rest of the world was still searching for the secret passwords that would log them onto the Network for Economic Development (NEED). Don't tell me you've forgotten what our slaughtered economics lecturer used to say of Japan and South Korea. Let me refresh your beweeviled memory, just in case:

He told us how Japan, for one, decided to borrow the Western system of production, but refused to borrow Western consumerism. This they did by training their children to eat distasteful raw fish from the very tender age of the kindergarten. In this way the children grew up to be hard-working producers, but poor consumers. Would you say that this hasn't made them successful? Today, should Japan but sneeze economically, the stock markets of New York, London, Paris and the rest of Europe would shiver like reeds in a storm. The same could be said of South Korea, which quickly forgot about the unpleasant colonial experience, and was determined to venture as far afield as any Western henchman of Prince Capital or Lord Greed could. This spirit is shared by one and all, and to demonstrate their commitment, factory workers are ready to sacrifice holiday, so that their firms might succeed.

I know you are itching to say my strokes are far too broad here, and that as a philosopher, I ought to be more nuanced. You

are dying to point out that the USA did pour money into the two countries to prevent their warming up to the Big Socialist Bear, and to ensure that Japan did not rise again to pose a challenge. You want to say, that had Africa been or posed a problem of any strategic interest, the USA would have come with the same carrot and stick. Don't miss the point.

What do we find in our case? The Dark Continent, I mean the Sleeping or Dribbling Continent, if you prefer. We opted for the finished product from the very beginning, paying only scant attention to the production process; as this famous recommendation by a veteran francophone leader we both know, shows: "Consumons d'abord, fabriquons après." With such an attitude, we went ahead to teach our children and people how important a person is, when every other person is toiling hard to produce what the important one is dying to consume. Kings and queens don't work, do they? Don't they simply stand by and watch others toil on their behalf? You realise what this implies, don't you? No one can be a king for long if he does not own and control the means of production. Does it surprise you that kings from pre-colonial Africa who refused to go along with the times, have faded into oblivion in the present order where new values, particularly those in tune with Western beliefs and aspirations, have

replaced what they stood for? Without money, and with people no longer willing or capable to make the same sacrifices old, these kings have become peripheral, and at best are considered government auxiliaries with the duty of faithfully interpreting central policies in the regional areas.

Perhaps the need of a firm economic base for effective political control offers an explanation as to why Africa is constantly vandalised by the modern kind of king who is at risk of losing his records of consumerism. Last week I saw a newspaper in which was an article entitled: "Africa forever" was accompanied by a cartoon of Africa as a cow being milked by what looked like a black leader, under the strict supervision of a seemingly pregnant white businessman. What struck me, however, wasn't the act of milking Africa at all, but the fact that the milker wouldn't stop milking even though the cow had ceased to yield! The caption added to the symbolic meaning of the title of the article: "Why not milk Africa forever? We have been milking for decades, and have become accustomed, so that we find it difficult to stop, even though we can see that the supply of milk is exhausted, and that we are merely wasting our time." It is up to you to make head or tail of this.

My journey was wonderful! Remember that it was my first ever in a plane. I know you've never travelled by air (except in your dreams - which you have in abundance), so don't dare smile like a mockingbird. I'm a step ahead of you on the unique path to progress, and maybe this is going to remain the case! Can't I afford a singular pride of place between our superiors and absolute inferiors like you and your likes? That is what I mean when I say people are constantly seeking to assure themselves of their relative superiority! I know you realise I'm joking, but don't you forget that half our truths are said in jest.

Remember how you once described me? I remember, even if you pretend you don't. You said: "Charles, sometimes I can't help thinking that you are essentially a joke. I can never tell when you're saying anything in earnest, joking or simply being tongue-in-cheek! Do you realise that such an ambiguous personality isn't always an advantage? It can also be an extravagant inconvenience." I must be honest enough to admit that your judgement was apt. You may well be recommended for a Nobel Prize, the Prize for Character Assassination!

I've got myself entangled in all sorts of spider webs before. At different times, I've been accused of crimes I never committed, just because I happened to have been cynical when

people believed themselves deadly serious in their quest for solutions to the jigsaws of life. The power-hungry believe I'm an ambitious black sheep that must be watched closely. Some critics have summed me up as an enigma. Perhaps one of you, who insist on spotting only the specks in my eyes, should tell me your reasons why I mustn't, unlike everyone else, be unpredictable in thoughts, words and deeds? Remember that I'm first of all a person, ordinary like any other, before being a philosopher. Which perhaps explains why I have succeeded in maintaining my principles so well so far. One needs to be a philosopher to stick to one's beliefs, because only a philosopher would know when to push those beliefs upstairs, and when to bring them back downstairs. The point I have struggled in vain to make thus far, is that you shouldn't believe what you think I want you to believe, but what you want to believe. Don't you ever allow yourself to be blindfolded by labels and titles. Lesson number one, tuition, a month's salary!

I enjoyed the journey, every second of it, though sitting next to me was an individual who would have loved me not to. He was a veritable nuisance! How disgusting! He kept capitalizing on my bushmanly ignorance. Imagine him jeering instead of quietly teaching me how to fasten my seatbelt! You are in

problems, Moungo, if ever you hope to take off before death beckons. You would always sit by a person like my restive friend, who would stop at nothing to make a fool of you. How impatient with inexperience he appeared to be! So much so that I was stunned when he couldn't fill in the travel form he was given. He had imbibed much about civilisation but hadn't the civilised ability to read and write, which was all I in turn could boast of.

My neighbour was on his way to France, to purchase suits, dresses, perfumes, bleaching creams (for those desirous of improving upon their complexions), and other symbols of civilisation for sale back home. Just as we approached Orly Airport in Paris, he unpocketed a huge pile of CFA notes that he counted over and over again, determined to stop making the mistake he never succeeded to avoid - which was, counting 5000F as 10000F. But my poor friend was never allowed to touch down on French soil. What a loss to the French economy and culture! He had forgotten to obtain an entry visa for France. The last time I saw or heard him was when he was angrily reproaching the French immigration authorities. "Merde!" he protested. "La France, toujours raciste!" In the calm pensiveness of his disappointment, he added in a deep slow voice on the brink of tears: "Le blanc est vraiment méchant comme une chienne mère." Heaven

alone knows what he meant. I forgot to find out his country of origin, perhaps because he looked very much like a no-land's man.

London is a beautiful city, a real masterpiece. It makes me proud of Man's creative genius. Imagine the vast dense equatorial forest of southern Cameroon transformed into a modern kind of jungle with giant buildings, sophisticated motorways, and cars that are as plentiful as ants, without, of course, forgetting the thousands of businessmen and women that crowd the streets from dawn to dusk, chasing after Capital that never tires of changing hands. Imagining this would give you a picture of London, from where I'm writing.

Yes, London is well and truly beautiful. Even the bloodstained syringes abandoned by drug addicts, the sex-smell of condoms used by lovers who can't wait, the dog shit that makes you stuff your nostrils with cotton, the reeking smell of urine in the Underground and subways, or the nauseating graffiti that spatters the walls of buildings and buses, yes, even these are not off-putting enough to take anything away from the beauty that is London.

As I look through the window, I'm amazed by what I see. Every house has a TV antenna attached on its rooftop, and, granted what I read from one of the brochures given me at Gatwick, more than 51 per cent of

households have two or more television sets and at least one video cassette recorder; quite unlike back home where we are still struggling to get on our feet as far as this 'medium of entertainment' is concerned. I wonder why they call it a medium of entertainment, when all I've got out of it so far is knowledge, knowledge about the English way of life and outlook on others. A strange case of a misnomer indeed.

Talking of the beauty of London, believe me when I say Man can move mountains when he truly wants to. You must not think of Man as essentially destructive, for London is there to prove you wrong in the absolute. Perhaps life's only tragic aspect is the fact that Man powerhouses two diametrically opposing sentiments, love and hatred, and, as such, harbours both the forces of construction and destruction. It is tragic in the sense that the conflict between these two forces cannot be resolved permanently, in any other way than by denying them fuel. And there is no way of doing the latter effectively except by destroying the powerhouse! And you know what that implies. Solution finale: la destruction de l'homme!

I'm staying at the Mandela Hotel. Laugh your lungs out if you please, but this is the gospel truth. Ask me why I chose to stay at The Mandela, and I would say quite simply

that it is the cheapest in town. For London is as expensive as it is beautiful; beauty's always been hard to acquire. Remember how long it took you to win Monique's love? "But how come Mandela has a Hotel in London?" you may ask, in your characteristic imbecility. "Hasn't he been in jail for one score years and more?" You are right, Moungo. Mandela has been imprisoned for over a quarter of a century, but his name is the freest in the West, free as the wild wind. Though in prison, he remains a symbol for Freedom and Democracy. In fact, Mandela is more than popular here, even though he might not be quite aware of this. People have named their beloved children, pubs, restaurants, hotels, parks, pets and cherished jewellery after him. He might be unable to bear the burden of apartheid in South Africa, but his name virtually dominates all others here in the West. Names that would otherwise be supreme are only second to his.

Thus, Moungo, if ever you fall in love with fame, know that you must have to sacrifice so much. If you want a popular name, you must have an unpopular skin colour. Is Jackie your daughter still mad about becoming a model? I'm afraid she might have to bleach her skin and reshape vital components of her face, to be accepted in the highly competitive and disfiguring world of Fashion and Haute

Couture. Their motto: "Pas de noires. No to dark faces." Advise her if you can. The sooner the better. But some people don't need to make any sacrifice at all, because they are in positions of power, though you and I must always be expected to make huge sacrifices, at home or abroad, alive or dead. We must always be prepared to dance to the tunes of those who, according to the reputed Achebe, have both the knife and the yam. That, of course, is the order of things. Ours, not God's though.

You may think the Mandela Hotel is cheap because it is poorly built and managed. But that's where you are wrong. It is the name of the hotel that makes it cheap, and not the poor quality of its services or architecture. (Nothing is poorly built or managed in London, at least, not by our standards. Even the squalor of its inner-cities and tower blocks are only despicable by London's high standards.) It would in fact have been a five-star hotel, if it weren't named after Mandela or painted negro-dark. The owner of the hotel, a businessman with left-wing sympathies, had mistakenly thought that naming it after Mandela would make it more popular. On the contrary, I have read in some outspoken papers (and Her Majesty's Queendom isn't short of them) that the very name Mandela chases away black and white customers alike.

Most whites, as you would expect, have been socialised wittingly or otherwise to treat black as an inferior, sinister, ominous, Godforsaken colour. On the other hand, there are some blacks who religiously believe in the inherence of their inferiority, and who would avoid doing anything that might spark off further prejudices. But apart from these two traditional groups, there are those self-conscious and critical blacks who consider the name of the hotel a blatant hypocritical gesture; an attempt by the white hotelier to weep more than the owner of a Zulu corpse -- thus, to them, being just as racist as the Boers who practise apartheid. This group would argue that the owner of the hotel has used Mandela's name to make money, not because of any fundamental commitment to racial parity. These issues are complex, and I might touch on them in subsequent letters, but don't take this for a promise.

London is like a cramped dungeon under the African Sun. The bus driver who brought me from Gatwick Airport to this hotel, laughed when I told him our country had ten million and one inhabitants when I left it. When he had laughed to his fill, he explained himself. He said it excited his sense of humour to hear that a single city could be more populated than a whole country. I told him not to be silly, for examples of far less populated

countries abound in the world, some of which are right in Europe! He nearly accused me of drunken aggression. I would have asked him what he meant by that. And perhaps he would have taken me to the police station for threatening his Englishness and Freedom of Being. Today I can only be thankful to you for advising me against being a fool in a land where angels fear to tread.

Doesn't it strike you as odd that this driver, thoroughbred though he might be, ignores the basics about countries and their populations, when Europe is quite so varied? The myth in Cameroon is that those, whose business it is to transport people from one place to another, are among the most informed in the country. You may recall the story of the African President who once foiled a coup plot, thanks to a taxi-driver who had overheard the rebels discussing their strategy, and who had gone straightaway to inform His Excellency the Live-President of the Republic. Perhaps taxi-drivers here are equally well-informed, but I haven't yet had the courage to take a taxi. I was strongly warned by a fellow traveller to avoid taking taxis in London, if I am poor and want to avoid a heart attack. I have faithfully followed his advice, because I'm poor and because I have a bad heart.

It might please you to know that the bus driver in question has a profound interest in

Southern African affairs. I might even dare guess that his parents must have migrated from that region, though my hatred for him overpowered my objective disinclination to be biased. That is the weakness with philosophy and philosophers, the ability to abandon Cartesian Rationalism when it matters most. From Gatwick to the city centre my ears were virtually colonised by talk of this region of Africa, which seemed of such great concern to my driver-friend. He talked of how Namibia would certainly not be independent in the foreseeable future, not because white South Africans wanted it thus, but simply because the progressive and economically well off blacks were afraid to lose their current privileges in the event of a SWAPO Government. He told me of how the reality in Namibia was quite different from popularly held beliefs in Africa, and that Sam Nujuma had very little support from the educated black elite, who saw the advantages of being Westernised and considered nothing wrong with "suspect wealth," as the lazy would describe the fortunes of the hard-working.

Most remarkably however, though he vehemently condemned apartheid, he never ceased referring to Zimbabwe as Rhodesia and to Azenia as South African Republic . Equally striking was his determined reference to Angola and Mozambique as branches of

Portugal rather than trees in their own right. You may be boiling with anxiety to make me understand that as far as these countries are concerned, this gentleman was merely being realistic. You are right! I couldn't name any truly independent country in Africa, if I were asked to. But my point is simply that of trying to understand why our friend was so reluctant to recognise even the flag independence of these banana republics. I see far more bitterness in his intransigence. He belongs to that group of people who believe they were made to shape and not to be shaped by history. I wish him the best in all his misdeeds, and regret my failure to ask him for his address. But, the world being what it is, I can't be sure I've met him for the last time.

Do my digressions disturb you? Please, forgive me if they do, but I just can't write my letter in a dark hole. Once in a while, I have to make crevices in the walls in order to force in more and more light, just to keep going and to help you understand better. Letters are meant to contain more than just the bare bones, they are supposed to be flesh and blood, and to be capable of truly representing their senders, just as if the latter were present themselves, and were actually talking face to face with those for whom the letters are meant. We are all emotional beings, and whoever pretends otherwise, must be taken to Freud's, Adler's or

Jung's tomb, and psychoanalytic rituals performed to purge him of hidden fantasies and phobias. This aspect negotiated, permit me to digress once more.

No one would deny that the way to independence in Africa was and has remained rough. Call it flag independence if that pleases your subversive cynicism. In one particular country, the struggle for independence was most violent, tiring and demanding. People were mobilized right from the grassroots to support nationalism with all their might. Peasants were called upon to sacrifice body and soul and win for themselves a place in the future years of democratic abundance. Witchdoctors were asked to use their powers to chase the whiteman away, and diviners were commissioned to consult the ancestors and say precisely when the country would be free for blacks to rule. In fact, all were invited to sacrifice past and present displeasures for future grandeur and plenty. At last, their struggles bore fruit, and what has come to be known as "flag independence" was granted. The white Masked Dancers withdrew to the background and were replaced by their shadows, the black pawns. The dance of the puppets was on.

But instead of getting better, things worsened. Instead of democratic abundance and populous grandeur, the masses could

barely scratch a living under a scorching dictatorship. "What has become of all the promises?" people began to wonder. Then, more and more, the peasants began to ask one another: "When will this '*ndependa*' end?" and to visit the witchdoctors and diviners, this time, not to chase away the whiteman, but to invite him back, because, in reality, he was the better of two devils. It is less painful to die by the hands of a stranger, than to be killed by someone whom you've always believed a brother. Remember Caesar's '*Et tu Brute?*'

But the peasants' cries and calls for help go unheeded, because they have no way of communicating directly with the white man, without passing through the very brothers and sisters who have disappointed them, and whom they desperately want to chase away. Today, those apostles of modernity who condescend to pay the villages a blue-moon visit can still hear these wretched peasants wailing in absolute despair: "We are really fed up. Just when shall we see the back of '*ndependa*', so that we can breathe freely again?"

You may consider this a silly thing that only confirms the supposed ignorance and imbecility of the African peasants. But I say you are gravely mistaken. How many times have I repeated to you that to be illiterate in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and what have you, does not imply that one is

unintelligent? The peasants are far more endowed than we have ever had the patience and humility to recognise, and I fear that by the time the Masked Dancers think of doing so, it may be too late. There is a lot of implied meaning in the complaint launched by the peasants against independence. Can you guess? ... I know you would say you can't, just for the sake of having me say it. You like the sound of my voice, don't you? Clever idiot! Stealing away all my ideas, eh? Anyway, I'm not afraid of theft, because I have these ideas in super abundance! You can sneak into my mind to prove me right. You would never, at any single moment, find a fence round it or a padlock on the door. I must say this in part explains why mine is a most plundered and vandalized mind. My mother used to tell me as a child that when a cow is young and soft, people tend to eat even its bones. But I still stubbornly insist that the best way to grow richer and mightier isn't by crushing others with iron dentures.

That is the position of the African peasant today. A most pathetic position indeed. He toils under the sun, moon and stars, like Jimmy Cliff's slave-parents did, in order to sustain the urban centres with their bunches of consumerist civil servants and professional idlers of your calibre. It is thanks to the peasant's food and cash crops that these civil

servants are able to excel in barren consumerism. Remember that in many a country in Africa, it is idiotic to talk of the taxpayer's money in the same way one would do here in Europe. For the only true taxpayer in the economic sense of the word is the peasant who actually produces; who creates wealth. The civil servants produce nothing, they create nothing; and because of their mediocrity and bureaucratic spiders' webs, they co-ordinate nothing; what they do instead is squander the toil and bleeding sweat of the peasant in connivance with the *Ngomna* that has no form of revenue other than nicking from the blindfolded and the forsaken. They've simply failed to see the need to earn before they spend. Where they are less successful in making the peasants dance to their tunes, or where the latter have said enough is enough, that it is better to die than to toil in vain, widespread famine and malnourishment are the inevitable consequence. Yet, even then, the peasant is doomed, for foreign aid intended to relieve everyone is misappropriated by their urban-centred exploiters.

The only other sector that could claim to produce, and therefore to be tax-payers, is the business sector. But unfortunately, the state and its bureaucrats, like the python in our mythology, have swallowed the country's businesses. Little business is in private hands,

and the few private operators there are choose to bank abroad for safety's sake, to avoid the caprice of the unstable political arena wherein they operate. The state-owned businesses are everything short of profit-making enterprises; they are in fact run as "public-private" businesses for the benefit of those in power, and more often than not, instead of making money for the government, the latter is forced to borrow to keep them going, and to save face by so doing.

Thus, in real economic terms the heavy, and in most cases the only, tax-payer is the highly marginalized peasant. The civil servant cannot, and should never boast he pays taxes, for in practical terms, no economy can be considered to be on its feet if a nation must borrow in order to settle its debts. Just how can a civil servant who depends entirely on the peasant (the selfless producer), claim to be contributing to the economy? The civil servants are like the inflated queen of the termites, comfortably seated in her fattening chamber, waiting to be fed by her toiling and selfless soldiers. It is thanks to the peasant's food and cash crops that these civil servants excel in consumerism. I repeat: most African countries owe a large part of their foreign exchange to the sole effort of the peasant community.

The tragedy of the African peasant today is that, unlike in the past, he is exploited

by two forces. His blood is sucked by two parasites - the one swimming inside the blood, and the other attached like a tick to the peasant's body. The problem is that the peasant produces cotton, groundnuts, cocoa, coffee and tea, the prices of which are not determined by him, but by some imaginary individual called the International Market Forces. Handicapped by his supposed ignorance, he has struggled in vain to book an audience with this all-important superman, who might be likened to the tick that sucks the blood from without. But who has a counterpart and collaborator who lives in the blood and who stirs it up to facilitate sucking, for, with the advent of AIDS, doctors have advised that blood is best sucked warm.

But this internal parasite isn't a mere catalyst. He equally has a duty to swell his accounts in foreign banks, Swiss banks by preference, where anonymity is a matter of policy. He also needs villas in the US and Europe, where he can live when he comes to consult the doctor on coup-phobia, obesity, hypertension, and to find out about the latest scientific discoveries on life-expectancy. These villas are also intended to serve as retirement homes, or as emergency resorts in the case of ouster by revolution or by popular coup d'états. To do all that he does, he needs gallons of blood to nourish his veins and replenish

wasted energy. In real terms, this means that after Mr International Market Forces has arranged the prices to his best interest, he pays this money to the internal vampires, the self-appointed intermediaries of Count Dracula. The latter, after chopping off the pound of flesh that guarantees him a seat in the exclusive club of the filthy rich of our planet, leaves the peasant with a bare minimum of tokens, seldom adequate to pay his taxes, school fees for his children, hospital bills (or the healer and diviner's charges) for his family, transport fares to take food to his urban masters, and a bottle of beer or two to make him gloss over and be philosophical about his exploitation.

I know one of the first things you would like to ask me concerns the issue of class in this society. Honestly, I'm still too new to have formed any impressions. However, I'd reiterate what I've told you about the class situation in Africa. It is foolhardy to attribute to Africa the classic notion of two classes in constant opposition to one another. Again, I must confess as I've done many times before, that I have never read Marx. I don't intend to in the near future either, and would challenge anyone who thinks that I lack legitimacy as a philosopher because I ignore dear old bearded Marx! Just as one doesn't need to be literate to be intelligent, so too, one doesn't need to have

read Marx to be philosophical or critical-minded. My point echoed, permit me to proceed to classify Africans, despite my "ignorance" if you insist.

We ought to see Africa as a pyramid of three distinct classes, where the class at the base is the most exploited. So in Africa we can identify, firstly, those without the opportunity to steal either from others or from the state: this class is made up of the toiling peasants who live in the rural areas despite themselves, and who are closely attached to their ancestral prescriptions of the good, normal and upright life, again, despite themselves. When one is in a position of weakness, most of what one does is despite oneself, won't you agree?

This is the case, though African elites would like to idealise the "Traditional African" in order to perpetuate their suppression of this unfortunate class of sidestepped beings. For the simple truth, believe it or not, is that the vociferous about preserving African culture and values are those least endowed with these. At best, they visit their villages once a year, either to consult the diviner on their prospects for job promotion, or to campaign for the re-election of the sole candidate of the sole political party. My contention, dear Moungo, is that the Traditional Africa, allegedly epitomized by the peasant class, which I happen to know well enough, is a symbol of

tradition despite itself; the African peasants have been forced to pose as custodians of a tradition of which nobody, least of all the leaders, is proud. The villager isn't interested in preserving tradition any more than his urban counterpart is; he wants his own portion of the scarce cake of modernity, which has been and continues to be confiscated by the powerful few in the cities.

Tell me how many times the young men and women of the rural areas have been coerced to remain in their villages, under the pretext that the cities are centres of vice, crime and bad habits? Why should some people be allowed to live in the cities at all, if cities are as bad as constantly painted to the peasants? The truth is, for their power to have any meaning, the urban-based elites or leaders must make the peasants their scapegoats. They give the impression that the peasants have something they ought to be proud of, but their daily activities and behaviour are such that they undermine the very doctrine of the importance of upholding African traditions, culture and values. At best, these elites want only what they term "traditional dances" or "*les danses folkloriques*," which they can use for their personal amusement, or to entertain their foreign friends and counterparts. Thus the only time one actually hears of "our cultural heritage" is when Rousseau's "noble savage" is

pulled out of the “happiness” and “naturalness” of his village, (like the bull-fighters of ancient Rome) to entertain his urban Lords and Masters either during National Day celebrations, Revolution Anniversaries, or at the occasion of the visit of a foreign head of state. Performances which were reserved for solemn occasions in the past have today been trivialized, because the new breed of leaders knows next to nothing about the societies they so claim to represent.

Secondly, we can distinguish those who have the opportunity to steal from others, but who find it difficult to steal directly from the state because they are constantly under surveillance by their bosses. It takes a thief to catch a thief! This class consists of the civil servants and literate or semi-literate urban dwellers. They are midway between the abject poverty and hardship of the village, and the filthy riches and sumptuous plenty of the self-elected few who form the higher rungs of the urban community. Because of the uncertainty in their stealing opportunities, they are forced to have one foot in the city and one foot in the village. Some of them live buried in the deplorable squalor of bleeding ghettos in divided cities, or in what some men and women of modern learning have termed “urban villages”. Because their financial prospects are often unpredictable, their links

with the villages are still strong, and they are forced from time to time to rush home to half-forgotten peasant relatives for food, protective charms and other types of favours. But on the whole, they are better off, because they live where they choose to live; unlike the peasant, they have not been forbidden the benefits of modernity, no matter how tiny their share of these.

Thus it is clear that this intermediate group or class, like South African blacks, when compared to the masses of 'independent' Africa, are economically and politically better off. I know you would scream as you did when I last dared to say that South African blacks were economically better off and politically more awake than the majority of people in independent Africa. South African blacks may lack legislative freedom under white minority rule based on racism, but this does not make them any worse off than the masses of independent Africa, whose freedom is more paper than daily experience. On the contrary, the universal attention given the plight of South African blacks has helped even the most illiterate amongst them to develop political consciousness and to free themselves of the blinding scales of ignorance. Whereas the ruling minority in the rest of Africa has used attractive pieces of legislation and declarations of intent to divert the critical attention of the

world from their political dictatorships and economic apartheid; it is the astuteness or couldn't-be-bothered attitude of their masses, not their good governance that keeps them in power. But the day is not far away when the peasants will pull down their scales and trigger riotous anger. That day, there shall be no turning back.

This group of Africans that rules without legitimacy constitutes our third and final class. A class comprising those who have the nigh exclusive opportunity to steal from the state, and who believe that what matters is being rich, not how one gets rich. They make no secret of their motto: get rich or perish. These are the self-elected watchdogs of the National Cake. They are constantly mediating between themselves and the outside world, and never stop preaching to the peasants how dangerous rural exodus is, and how sacred life in the village has always been. This group comprises national political figures along with their provincial and regional representatives, top civil servants (easily identifiable in their thick woollen suits and well-polished Italian shoes, or in their gorgeous gowns, elaborately designed and imported from the Middle East), and pseudo-intellectuals who forge poems, compose songs and kill the aggressive instinct in their pen, with the hope of being appointed director of this or that public institution (which

perhaps explains why African governments have the chronic tendency to nationalize - turning everything into a patrimony of some sort, in order better to satisfy those who learn to say "yes" all the time). This, in fact, is the class entrusted with the Herculean task of developing Africa. A class wherein the greater one's influence, the greater one's chances of stealing from the state, of joining local and global consumer clubs, and of making empty promises to the people and the concerned outside world.

These, my dear Mounjo, are the true classes of African societies, not what some of you excited by the winds of neo-Marxism would want to transplant onto Africa. Of course, only a fool would blame you through and through. For doesn't Africa pose as the Sleeping Continent, a place without initiative; but one where everything ever construed and shaped in the image of the West is transplantable?

I reckon it is no longer news to you that in the glorious past most leaders in this majestic Queendom joined politics and campaigned vigorously to be elected into high office, not because they wanted to squander the family silver and gold, but because they would have loved to replenish it with silver and gold of their own. In those days, before the spread of greed, it wasn't uncommon to hear

of a leader, or two or three, who absolutely refused to be contaminated by the haunting rapacity of high office. Although today's Western leaders are in the main less honest, I'm inclined to think, perhaps naively, that these leaders are scarcely among the top earners of their countries. The situation, I should think, is much less like that in Africa where, almost everywhere, people seek power in order to empty public coffers into private pockets. They take refuge under the Public Interest banner to pursue personal goals with capitalist impunity. Thus, it isn't infrequent to find African leaders doing abroad what they consider unfeasible in "our young fragile nations". Public ownership and control is good in Africa because of limited resources; but African leaders can afford money not only to buy shares and stocks in foreign companies, but sometimes, even to own these companies. In this way, Africa is presented as a dense swampy forest with incredible riches, but where the hostile jungle and its primitive aborigines would allow nothing good to be undertaken, and so all avenues must be sought to siphon the riches to the West, where conditions are forever favourable.

I know of individual leaders thrice richer than the countries they govern. They would, like the Marcoses, feel cheated if the Guinness Book of Records failed to class them

amongst the top financial wizards ('enfants terribles') of the capitalist world. Doubtless a sign of greatness this to them must be! Remember our idea of relative advantage?

Moungo, tell me in earnest, if you were a leader and happened to be overthrown in a bloodless coup d'état, would you carry all the country's money away with you in a Land Rover? Or would you, faced with severe economic crisis, believe that the simple way out is to print more bank notes and flood the country with them? Would you think that the best way of impressing your foreign counterparts and friends is to give them the only precious stones that could earn your country a bit of foreign exchange? Would you preach African Socialism, yet find nothing wrong with purchasing a £40,000 bedroom in London for a voluptuous concubine? Would you proceed to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the revolution that catapulted you to power, when the rural folks were threatened by the very famine and malnourishment, which greased the way to your revolution a decade ago? Would you deprive an innocent people of the roads, water and electricity they badly need, just because a member of their 'tribe' is a political thorn in your flesh? Would you consider yourself a superman who knows all, and therefore not to be advised? Would you believe yourself when you try to make others

believe there is only one route to progress, and that route is you? Would you arise one fine morning and order the blood-dribbling extermination of every child with parents too poor to purchase for them school uniforms that bear your effigy? Would you stop every other woman from bearing the name Monique, just because it's your wife's? And would you sneak in through the back door to seize the power, which you held for twenty years and more, but that you freely gave up because your Western doctors misled you into thinking a further score years in power was bad for your health? Whether you accept or not, know that many an African leader has committed worse outrages.

In fact, I think Africa's greatest enemy is its leaders, with few exceptions. (Please don't interrupt. I know you would say Africa's enemies are its people. I remember you saying this before: "Each one of us is an African leader waiting for a place in the sun. Once given it, we thrive and show our true colours, which are sometimes worse than those of the worst dictators. I see this in people who head small things. They behave exactly like the leaders we all love to criticise. We are all made in the image of the dictators we love to hate." You also once said you guessed there is something in African anatomies and cultures which make us enemies to our own best interests, and which pre-disposes us to preaching more than

we practice. I know all that, and you know my position, so don't interrupt.)

The problem with making exceptions is that everyone tends to think he is the exception. If two individuals are suspected of a crime committed by one of them only, both are likely to swear in God's name they are innocent. Luckily, I'm writing to you and intend my letter to be read by you and you alone. I hate to pick a quarrel with anyone in power. Having been treated like a political mosquito before, I'm only too conscious what noises the powerful hate most to hear. The idiom, 'once bitten twice shy,' has a special meaning to me. Africa is the worst place to be a philosopher or sociologist. There, nobody in power wants the truth that these disciplines alone can unveil. I don't know what the reaction of leaders here is to these disciplines, but without making a firm promise, I might say a thing or two about it in my subsequent letters. However, I'm fairly certain that if philosophy and sociology are well pursued and the relevant fundamental questions asked, their subversive nature -- which should be the same in whatever society -- is bound to be unfavourable to the Establishment; and therefore genuine scholars, here as well, are likely to be distasteful pills for the authorities to swallow.

As far as African leaders are concerned, just try to reason along with me. We are agreed on the fact that most of them would virtually give up their ambitions for leadership and power, if there was nothing for them to steal once unfairly elected or catapulted into supremacy by dubious coups. We have also agreed that they are driven into excesses of greed by the false idea of their own importance or adequacy, a delusion of superiority, and a bizarre nose for red herrings. How elated they are, childishly, to have a house in Europe or America, where they can afford to live better than the middle-class white that stubbornly claims to be superior to them! How can the middle class housewife in the West claim superiority, when every bank holiday she jostles in the giant supermarkets with the wives of African Presidents and Ministers, who have flown over specially to shop at Oxford Street and to have their hair retouched? How many so-called superior whites are in the financial position to buy off designers' rights for particular dresses, in order to stop other women dressing like their wives? How many of their wives or mistresses can boast of a thousand pairs of shoes and more, or rings of ruby, diamond and sapphire? Just how many of them can earn enough money to take a holiday abroad, let alone dart from country to country, sampling body creams and make-ups,

and fishing for where prices are highest so that the value of what one buys is read from the price one pays? Just how thrilled African leaders and their mistresses are to know that without them, Swiss banks would be out of business! What a false sense of pride!

Doesn't this reveal, in black and white, that no matter what they might say to the contrary, the 'modern' African elite still acknowledges his supreme inferiority to the white man? Otherwise, why on earth would someone with any self-esteem underrate and denigrate what is his in matters cultural? Would you say there is need for a national radio station in a country where people's sets, for whatever reason, seem permanently tuned to broadcasts from across the Atlantic? What superiority or equality is there with someone, if you constantly denounce your own values, ways of thinking and doing? Would that someone, no matter how well-meaning and modest, not ask himself, without arrogance perhaps, but with legitimacy, whether you would be so keen on him, his ways and values, were there anything worth preserving in yours? And would you blame him and his folks for believing in the inherent superiority of their culture and values, when you yourself have exhibited such damaging impatience with what to him could well have been a valid alternative to the shortcomings of his own

social organisation and outlook? Heaven helps those who help themselves, remember?

All this is indicative of the superficial understanding these leaders have of themselves, Africa and the world. They are callous about their subjects and countries' problems, because they know next to nothing about them. Imagine an individual who received European education from when he was a child to when he became leader. All he knows is American history, English history, French history - Western history in short. He excels in Elizabethan literature, upholds Victorian values and remembers with nostalgia the good old days when he could recite all volumes by Shakespeare, chuckle at Chaucer's tongue-in-cheek humour, praise the psychology and genius of Dickens' plume, criticize Racine's sentimentalism, and agree with Corneille's heartlessness or fanatical commitment to "La Patrie." He is generally proud to have spent his childhood learning the 'right' things, and only thinks of his grandparents when acknowledging their foresighted decision to send him to the colonial school years ago. Apart from that passing reference, which often takes the form of a footnote, he knows nothing else about his people or ethnicity and doesn't really care to. As all of them love to say, people must be forward-looking. In the words of one, Africans

must part with the past and pair with the present. Don't ask me who; it's just no use. They say lots of beautiful things, but never seem to achieve even the ugliest minimum.

Scarcely can an African leader trace his lineage or recognise the immediate ancestry of his ethnic group. He was, after all, repeatedly told that there was neither history nor culture in Africa; and because he has the habit of mistrusting everyone who knows more than he does, he has never reasserted himself; and thus continues to grope in the dark, despite the fact that year in and out, the country spends huge sums of money training those who can advise him. Because he is still buried in his original ignorance and hates to know he doesn't know, like the tragic character that he is, he thinks he can effectively administer peoples who are as diverse and different as all the nations of Europe put together. Just how can such an adventurer succeed? His is a mission impossible. Quickly he realises that things must fall apart sooner or later, and concludes that the best line of action in these circumstances is to mine his own portion of the commonwealth, so as to be able to live ever after in glamour and abundance; promising, as did Louis XV, a devastating deluge to follow when he is gone for good.

Why have you never asked yourself, why it so happens that almost every African

leader that falls out of political fortune comes to the West or elsewhere abroad? Does it mean that the only way they believe they can contribute to nation-building is as politicians? It sounds as though once they realise they cannot contain the mess they helped bring about, they flee the country for a peaceful life abroad. What about those who cannot afford a journey even to the local city, but whose hard work helped sustain the powerful? What are these forsaken peasants to do, who cannot afford the luxury of being political refugees outside their own countries? Where have some of us left our hearts? Why don't we think more and more before we pose our acts? Does one really need to be a Christian to be good? Do we need to be believers in a God of any kind to know that when we do this or that out of selfishness and greed, our actions are bound to hurt and kill?

Remember that when you have a good understanding of someone or something, you are well placed to deal with that person or thing. How can a leader fail to cherish a deeper knowledge of his people, yet hope to succeed? Ask any African leader to name the ethnic groups that constitute his country, and he wouldn't be exact on anything. Force one to give a press conference, and he couldn't tell you where for sure his country is said to be affected by drought or famine. When there is a

natural disaster, that is when they send word around for information to be made available about the populations affected; they ask to know the location of the village or 'tribe' concerned, the number of "elites" from the area, and whether or not the afflicted are party-affiliates, peace-loving and obedient. But ask the very same leader the same questions about France or Britain, and they would bombard your ears with detailed facts, even when taken unawares. Ask him to name the major traditional kings (whom he derogates and undermines) in his country and he would betray an ignorance, unpardonable even in foreigners. But ask him to name English or French kings and queens since the inception of monarchy, and he would score a hundred and ten per cent. One must admit that in these matters, they baffle even the French and English. The misfortune is that the average French and English person is made to believe that his national culture and values must be universal, since even savages from as remote a continent as Africa appear to mimic them.

Briefly, to satisfy your curiosity, here are two examples. It is well documented that somewhere in the Sleeping Continent a leader awoke who often outmanoeuvred the English in Victorian pomposity, and who came to be considered to the right of Queen Victoria in matters conservative. I've heard it whispered,

more than once already, how this leader would be invited to put a few complicated things straight in the process of re-enacting certain Victorian performances. What a lucky man he must have been, to have the Queen's ear! It isn't easy to be consulted for expert advice by one's masters. But what an irony that this very leader, who knew the English and their traditions so well, was chased away by a 'tribe' of disgruntled peasants in his own country, because, as it turned out, the leader not only failed to visit them and find out what their problems were, but even ignored the name of their village (when he eventually paid them a visit to inaugurate an untarred road), despite the fact that they had fought actively by him throughout the struggle for independence.

The other example is of another leader whom we must praise in earnest. He is known and respected all over France for helping enrich the French language; a remarkable achievement, we must admit. Strange that with the exception of missionaries and anthropologists very few Europeans are allowed such a privilege in Africa, where African leaders themselves know next to nothing about African languages. You have certainly heard of the famous "Mini-Briton" who, despite his parents' efforts, refused to remember his mother-tongue, which he learnt as a child, and who today doesn't regret

spending a sizeable portion of the miserable national budget on interpreters, whose sole task is to make the forsaken masses understand “Our Father” (as he is forcibly known), who always addresses them in a cacophony of mixed English, Latin and Greek. It is not only for the sake of national unity that African governments have opted for European languages. It is also because most of our leaders fear the embarrassment of inviting the “ignorant” peasant to teach them what they should have learnt as children. Everything clearly fits into our jigsaw of power and relative advantage.

The tragedy with the modern or “elite” African leader is that he knows what he does not need, and needs what he does not know. This is the same as in economics, where he encourages the production of what he does not consume, and consumes what he does not produce. (I’ll return to this later.) A friend once made what appeared to be a very unkind remark about African leaders. But today I’m gradually changing my mind about what he said. He might have been right when he said that unscrupulous African leaders spend the best part of their days praying for natural disasters and famine to besiege their countries. According to my friend, it is during earthquakes, drought and famine that these leaders inflate their accounts in Swiss banks.

This is so because the bulk of what comes in as emergency relief finds its way out as private savings. At their luckiest, the affected villagers might be given a bit of milk and grain, or the containers in which the food was brought (to refresh their memories of how Western generosity snatched them from the hungry fangs of death).

To cover up their theft, these leaders employ the radio, television and the press, which they use mainly for propaganda purposes – to ensure their relative advantage over enemy ideologies and rival power-mongers – to rally the public and disseminate the utopian doctrines of African Socialism, moral rectitude, honesty, diligence and national unity. Their recurrent mistake is to think the peasants believe the filth they belch. This only reflects how out of touch with reality our leaders are. When will it dawn on them that the peasant smiles with cynicism on hearing their “empty noises that can only fool little children.” Would these leaders ever know it’s long past the time they descended into the villages to be baptised in the waters of ancestral wisdom?

Isn’t it a shame that outsiders have often shown much more commitment to the plight of our forsaken masses than have our leaders? Isn’t it a shame that funds intended for miserable peasants haunted by famine, flies,

vultures and the smell of death, are heartlessly diverted into foreign accounts by those who have brought about the misery in the first place? Isn't it an ignominy to the so-called African leaders, when foreign journalists are the first to inform the world about the troubles in their countries? Isn't it an abomination that they should proceed to celebrate fake anniversaries with pomp and ceremony (quite determined to veil the fact that thousands of their compatriots are dying of famine and malnourishment, while millions of others are fleeing the country in despair), making false statements of how their states are prosperous colossuses in emerging Africa? How do they feel when tons and tons of wheat, maize, milk and rice marked *"USA AID TO FAMINE-STRICKEN VICTIMS"*, *"AIDE FRANÇAISE AUX VICTIMES DE CATASTROPHE NATUREL"* or *"BRITISH AID TO DISASTER VICTIMS"* are found in local shops and supermarkets, when those for whom these foodstuffs were intended have died unattended? Why are we always developing alternative plans for aid intended for specific purposes? The reason behind such behaviour is simple. Greed aside, our leaders seem to claim to know our people better than the foreign donors. But is that true? I've already talked of how these leaders can scarcely say with precision the affected parts of their

countries. Ask them to name the villages involved, and they are tongue-tied! Yes, I feel so ashamed that outsiders, the dubiousness of their motives notwithstanding, have appeared to be more committed to our causes than our leaders have been. So that what philanthropic organizations have brought in through the front door has always gone out through the back door in the form of cheques addressed to foreign banks. Doesn't it strike you as absurd that donors manage what they have for Africa so well, yet as soon as this gets into African hands, things become muffled and begin to mark time? Very typical of the doubly dubious! Such sickening disregard for their people makes it difficult either to contest the conclusion that in Africa "the only thing which grows is MISERY," or to blame those who now argue against the whole idea of aid.

Do you know of Bob Geldof, Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie? Of course, you know of Cameroon's Manu Dibango and the other African musicians who sang "TAM TAM pour l'Ethiopie." These are all individuals that need a congratulatory handshake from us, lepers of the world. As musicians they mobilized the whole wide world to bear with the African masses in their famine. But if only they knew that much of their efforts went to enrich a few pockets! In a most renowned record Bob Geldof sings

“This is the World calling.” Yes, the world is effectively calling, though African leaders are unwilling to listen to the voices wailing in the wilderness. The world is calling on Africa to wake up and join in the “Race against Time” but African leaders would love Africans to be seen as the only race in the world that is unwilling to go along with changing times! The quest for wealth makes our leaders reluctant to believe that 8,400 people are dying every five hours of famine and malnutrition, and that nobody ought really to die when the funds that would have saved his life and others are banked away abroad!

Again, I can feel you dying to interrupt me here. I hear you saying, “Charles, dear, I think you should research this matter closely. I think you are lambasting African leaders because they are an easy target. Fact is this money once collected is channelled through Northern NGOs, to Southern NGOs and maybe a few lucky government departments. Often, if it is emergency aid, this comes in kind. Locals can only sell the produce to make cash. Otherwise, it is NGOs that make a killing. It is possible that in some countries, a veritable ‘public-private partnership’ is growing to spend donor money for personal wealth or even through theft in the form of rebels who hijack aid in high seas or on land. So please, go easy on these governments. They cannot

control some of this chaos.” You are entitled to your opinions, but do please let me continue.

Charitable institutions and altruistic individuals have struggled to undo the harm that our callous leaders have done their unfortunate subjects. We have been imprisoned by tyranny, and we must look for the key to free ourselves from tyranny. A political system which one can criticize safely only as a refugee in a Western country is a sick system that must be replaced. If leaders cannot tolerate alternative systems that reflect the plural nature of our societies, they must at least allow us the right to voice our frustrations without necessarily voting them out of office. If our leaders know their European history that well, they will have read of a certain Frederick the Great of Prussia, who had an agreement with his subjects that they could say whatever they liked, and he could do whatever he pleased. It appears that even such token tolerance within a tyranny is absent in Africa.

A promise is a debt, Mouno. So permit me to fulfil my promise to say what I mean when I claim that Africans produce what they don’t consume and consume what they don’t produce. There is an assignment for you. I prefer to do it this way, rather than pump my own conclusions into you as if you were an inflatable doll or a little baby quite incapable of carrying out your own investigations. So I

would ask you to visit two villages in our one and only Cameroon when you have time and means. One of them should be a cocoa-producing village, and the other, coffee-producing. It is preferable to visit on the village market day, so that you may meet as many people as possible. Ask any of the peasants why he is producing cocoa or coffee. He would never mention consumption as a reason. But he is most likely to tell you that in order to pay his taxes, educate his children, settle hospital bills (or pay the healer and diviner) and purchase clothes for his family so that his wife and children might not be miserable at Christmas, he has to spend his whole life producing this stuff. And he is most likely to add: "The white man alone knows what he does with such things. Whites have always been strange beings." Please Mounjo, promise that you won't sit in the city and draw your conclusions, would you?

If you defy my advice at all, and do that, you would come out with most faulty conclusions. For you would be tempted to conclude that Africans not only know what they produce, but that they also consume it, even though they might export most of it. That is the type of reasoning I would condemn as bullshit! You can't, just by observing a few urban Europhiles, conclude that Africans consume coffee and cocoa. Strange thing

anyway, to even contemplate a drink of cocoa and coffee at the heart of the heat of the tropics! These Europhiles have always made the world believe that what they do is representative of Africa. Quite tragic, for they are precisely the sort of people who ought not to be contacted, if one is interested in the truth about Africa.

Perhaps no one is interested in real knowledge about Africa. No doubt I have met some so-called World Bank experts many times. But they have done most extraordinary things! Imagine someone sent to find out about livestock breeding in Africa. Once he arrives, instead of going to the rural areas where this breeding takes place in both its most rudimentary and complex forms, he remains in the economic and political capitals, where he holds one political or business meeting after another – asking bureaucrats what livestock breeding in the country is like. (Just like asking a monkey what life is like in the sea!) When he is satisfied, he writes a report which invariably concludes: *“Donc, pour répondre à la question si l’Afrique peut partir ou non, je peux, à travers mes études profondes dans dix pays Africains, conclure sans faille que: L’Afrique est sur le point final de partir. Il faut alors renforcer l’aide économique, politique, technique et culturelle.”* And for such an expert conclusion, the World Bank gives him enough million dollars not only to preserve the expert for future research projects,

but to enable him to live like an academic prince for the rest of his life. The more experienced he becomes, the more his subsequent studies are concluded before they are carried out. Perhaps you are unaware that many experts go into the field with conclusions in their briefcases. There are countless examples of this, but I'll give you just one.

Scholars the world over seem compartmentalised into little cubicles or cults of knowledge, designed and constructed according to well-specified ideological leanings. It is only African intellectuals, I'm afraid, who seem forbidden through sterile censorship by their leadership to have any authentic ideological positions of their own; they are the ideologically dispossessed or acculturated of the world! Thus their borrowed philosophy of life, reflected in borrowed perspectives, is conceptually divorced from the practical realities of the peasant majority of the African states they study. My point is, even if some African scholars, aware of this problem, were ready to conduct critical research à l'Africaine, to develop schools of thought original and authentic to Africa, to create an African cult of scholarship so to speak, today's African leadership remains their most deadly opponent.

I'll give you a quick example. Imagine that there is a rubber plantation somewhere in

Cameroon. Also imagine that last year I accompanied a team of local sociologists to study "*l'instabilité de la main d'oeuvre*" in the said plantation. You may like to imagine that we insisted on reshaping the original question to read: "*pourquoi la stabilité des cadres, malgré l'instabilité de la main d'oeuvre?*" And you can guess that if we did that, we would not be allowed to carry out the piece of research, because we are likely to reach conclusions critical of the hierarchical structure of the plantation and of the excessive marginalization and exploitation of the miserable peasants plucked from their villages and brought to the jungle to nurture the transplanted seedlings of Capitalism. Fortunately for anyone guilty of cheating, no such critical studies have been carried out yet. So they can jolly well continue, at least, for now.

You must be wondering what is going wrong with me. "Charles promises to give an example of someone who undertakes a study with his conclusion in his briefcase, but starts rambling instead of going straight to the point!" Yes, I've got the madness of Professor Hiccup; remember him and his thick grey moustache? Anyway, the example I wanted to give is not exactly what you want to hear. I still want you to keep imagining that last year's study actually took place, and that one or two of these local sociologists were genuinely

critical. How do you think they were likely to react, were they in the course of the study to come face to face with say, "*un expert Français qui vient étudier comment camerouniser la plantation?*" Isn't their first reaction likely to be one of shock? Shock at why in order to Cameroonize the management of a company, we need a French expert to tell us how to go about it. Isn't it appropriate that since it has to do with handing things over to Cameroon, a Cameroonian and not a French expert ought to study it? Isn't there an implication here that Cameroon hasn't such experts, and that even if it had, they are not considered qualified enough by the management of the multinational? The critical sociologists are most likely to be suspicious of the decision to Cameroonize the management of the company at all. They are likely to divine that, perhaps because of the development of synthetic alternatives to natural rubber, the multinational has seen the latter has no future, and has therefore chosen to let Cameroon follow it to its grave. When placed within this perspective, what initially appeared senseless and illogical begins to develop a logic of its own and, once again, fits into our jigsaw of relative advantage and superiority. Applaud me, will you?

How many times have you heard certain countries described as "Tropical

Paradises without the Pitfalls?" Personally, I've heard the phrase used millions of times about countries with leaders sympathetic to the godfathers of the IMF and World Bank. Such declarations are often made at the airport by red carpet visitors on their way home. But have you ever asked yourself whether you equally see those countries as "Paradises?" You would need no convincing about the truth. What paradise is there for the nigh totality of nationals that swim in the hellishness of shacks of gloom, ignorance and misery? No! People should learn to say the truth. I would readily believe them if, instead of circumnavigating, they were much more open and straightforward about their sort of "paradise" – one for international and national exploiters only, but one which sees in Africa valuable resources to be tapped as nourishment for the rich and mighty. These countries are paradise because their leaders would rather cooperate with international thieves than listen to the dying voices of the forgotten.

Talking about theft, I have been thinking how best its victims could fight back. I ended up with a very interesting prescription. Before giving my illustration, I plead with you to take everything in good faith, for it isn't my wish to offend anyone. So I'll ask you to suppose that what I'm saying were indeed the

case. Okay. Moungo, suppose, just suppose Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan and the USA were seven master thieves. What, if you were asked, would you suggest as the best stealing policy for them to adopt in Africa? In other words, if these thieves wanted to partition Africa, what would you suggest as the best way forward, particularly when you realise that you could do nothing to prevent the partition?

I know this is a difficult question, but let me suggest what I consider the best way to go about it. I would definitely decry monopoly by one thief in any particular country. So, if France, for example, wanted to monopolise grabbing from, say, Cameroon, I would campaign vehemently against it. Rather, I would advocate a free theft policy. That is, I would want all seven swindlers to compete in freedom and democracy within the marketplace of Cameroonian abundance. Cameroon should be free to all for the picking. In this way, with some luck, the overburdened masses might pick up the crumbs of what belongs to them only in name. One possibility is that these thieves might, in the course of their violent struggle over oil, coffee, cocoa, rubber, tea or precious stones, savage and perhaps kill one another like rottweilers. Should this happen, wouldn't the dribbling, the snorting epileptic and the asthmatic of

Cameroon stand to benefit? Those of them interested in professional nicking as well, may indeed drink the blood or eat the flesh of the injured or killed grandmaster, to ensure continuity.

It is also possible that before Cameroon, these thieves of great renown and ability might have plundered other countries along the way. In which case, Cameroon stands to benefit should the thieves all get killed in the course of their fight over who gets what, just like the three men in Chaucer's famous tale, who set out to destroy death, but whom death destroyed instead. But such possibilities are unthinkable if a single thief is allowed monopoly in any given country. Our experience of colonialism should serve as an example of how detrimental monopolies are. It's not for nothing that I've never learnt to play the game Monopoly!

My dear Moungo, I must confess that is that for now. I've written nothing worthwhile because my impressions are still shaky. You know I've just touched down, and it is going to take quite some time before I begin to understand this complex Queendom. Forgive me therefore, if I've been rather longwinded, speculative and disgracefully unrealistic in all I've said above. But even odious fools like Shakespeare's Dogberry or me, do run out of silly things to say. Therefore, I beseech you to

be tolerant with my bullshit; with a bit of care, patience and tolerance, you might find that not all I've written is worthless. This said, remember that when a phenomenon is widespread or so likely to occur in any situation, it ceases to be worth the trouble illustrating with specific examples. May God bless you.

Yours sincerely

Charles

N.B. I will do my very best to keep a record of all my major experiences, thoughts and impressions about life here in England. In this way, I will be able to furnish you with detailed, reliable information when next I write. Give my warmest regards to Monique your wife and to Jackie your daughter.

PART TWO

House QK,
196 Cromwell Road,
Manchester M17 3CYX,
ENGLAND.

Dear Moungo,
This letter is perhaps sooner than you expected, but a lot has happened in the past week that I ought to write to you about without delay. Given my primitive and reluctant memory, what could be better than writing now while the ideas are hot, the experiences real and the impressions fresh? I advise you to copy the above address into your address booklet, and conceal it in that same dark hole where Ghaddafi's Green Book is hidden, before reading on. Knowing how easily excitable Monique is, and how mischievous your daughter Jackie has always been, anything can happen to this letter; but because I hate to feel imprisoned, lonely or abandoned this imminent winter, I implore you to accord presidential protection to my address. People have been estranged for life because of their carelessness with addresses.

As you jolly well know, this is going to be my first winter ever. Already I hate to think of it, because of the awful stories I've heard. Everyone I've met so far seems very concerned, the elderly most especially, who are said to be usually the worst affected. My landlady spent an hour yesterday drilling me

on how to survive the winter, which she believes might be worse than last year's, which was the worst in 18 years. (The English adore superlatives, especially in praise of themselves!) I look forward to seeing the snow for the first time.

The sun has not shone since I arrived in this Queendom, but the English say this is the best summer they've had in decades. Everywhere I'm greeted with fog thicker than the cloud of gunpowder at the funeral of a warrior, but this doesn't seem to bother the drivers who race about in fast cars without accidents. My days have been dull, wet and freezing; but here the English are lying in their parks or roaming the streets in shorts and open-chested shirtsleeves, airy mini-skirts and perforated blouses of silk or light cotton. Bandaged-up in thick wool and padded boots and gloves, I look like an American footballer from Mercury! "What a wrong time to come here," I thought initially, until Thomson and Thomson (my two English friends) laughed and said: "There is no right time to visit England." I feel insulted by the weather, which I can't but compare to a housewife out of favour with her brutish husband: she is either sulking, weeping, nagging or all three at once. But seldom happy! What an ill-omen in this country of the white man, for a thirsty philosopher of 35 from the Sleeping Continent!

Talking about the colour white, I wonder whether whiteness is romantic any more. Snowy Darwinian Purity has ceased to be a value of import. Imagine that TV presenters are threatened with the sack if they stay white! No product, I've learnt, would sell unless advertised by a white woman darkened by the sun or electricity. Judging from what I've heard on TV and read from the papers, everyone is fascinated by the sun; in fact, so fascinated that the most popular paper in this Queendom is named after the sun! They all want to take a holiday to Greece, Spain and the Caribbean to bathe themselves in the sun and be tanned by it. Millions of English holidaymakers flood to various resorts, defying the myth or reality which links the sun with skin cancer, and telling terrorists and striking air-traffic controllers to go to hell, so that they might have their share of the sun unperturbed.

Two days ago I sat in the bus within earshot of a pretty young English woman with a face roasted in patches and a neck shedding its skin like a snake, and happened to overhear her proudly asking her friend to guess what had happened to her face. The friend's guess was inaccurate, so she was told about the scourge of the sun in Rhodes. This friend, though equally pretty, was less fortunate this summer, but she hopes to make it next year;

and has taken up a part-time job in her local pub in order to save towards her prospective holiday. Both girls however, seemed disappointed with the fact that the tan they work so hard to acquire, never lasts long enough. "In three weeks, it would have all gone; leaving me pale and pink, like a ghost! How terribly awful, Julie!" said the one with the roasted face and peeled neck. "Yes, Sam," her friend agreed, "that's the sad thing about it, innit? But it won't stop me!" she added with Thatcherite determination.

By the way, do you know where Rhodes is, Mouno? Go and find out from your diviner, because I won't tell you this. Find out about Barbados, Majorca and many other resorts frequented by the pink and wealthy. You should know your geography well enough! Don't be as embarrassing as some of the people I've met here. Every time I tell someone I'm from Cameroon, I have to be just as prepared with an atlas to show where on earth Cameroon is situated. Meaning: "Had Cameroon been of any importance, we would have known of it in the same way we know of Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe, South Africa..."

I've almost lost my breath trying with all the subtlety imaginable to convince stubborn English men and women that Africa isn't a country, but a continent! (Their fathers

and forefathers sliced it up into little hamlets. They ought to know better.) But little seems to register. "So you're from Africa, eh?" they insist pan-Africanly, only out of ignorance. "Tell me about Africa then," a young lady would ask with the politeness of the English parody of a smile. All I do is laugh, sometimes rudely, but never without a certain sense of jungle superiority. When I ask them the same question about Europe, I realise they don't even know England that well. "Oh, my geography is awful. I'm sorry," they invariably excuse themselves. I can't help feeling insulted by such inflationary ignorance amongst a people so endowed and facilitated!

Thursday afternoon, I met an old man who boasted he'd lived in Zimbabwe until chased out by Independence, but he couldn't say for sure whether Cameroon is an island in North or West Africa. With the patience of the philosopher that I'm supposed to be, I told him the truth, though he insisted he was right. And not wanting to infringe his democratic right to falsehood, I agreed he must be. Others vaguely insist Cameroon is a former French-colony, since the name doesn't sound familiar to the imperial ear; and ignorantly congratulate me for the "good English" I've learnt in addition to French, "your mother-tongue." I wonder what they would say, if they weren't so full of themselves, and were told the truth that my

French is about as corrupted as theirs (which I hear is worse than bad), because I hail from the former Southern Cameroons, the English-speaking section of our decreed bilingual republic.

The only person I've met so far who knows slightly more than nothing about Cameroon is Professor Redhead, my eccentric supervisor. He proudly told me how he first heard of Cameroon during the August 1986 gas disaster that claimed two thousand lives. I won't be surprised if in a week when school resumes, Professor Redhead tells me he's never heard of African Philosophy. That's when, instead of him supervising my work, I'll supervise his, and perhaps by the time I leave this Queendom, he will have graduated as an African Bachelor in Witchcraft, Superstition and Occultism. Rest assured, I'll tell you everything about this product of Oxford.

I'm tempted to think that no one here really thinks seriously of ignorance as a vice. Perhaps, again, it has to do with the idea of relative advantage and superiority. It sounds as if the person or nation, who happens to be in a position of power, does not bother to learn about the realities and concerns of those who are inferior. Thus, during colonialism, it was the Africans who had to adopt the language, culture and values of the colonial masters. Today it is the militarily and economically

weaker nations that have to learn all about their counterparts who are more sophisticated in these areas. In Africa, the peasants and masses are expected to recite the names and titles of those in power but who don't care a damn about them.

Do you realise by now that it is all a matter of POWER? The person who owns the yam and the knife calls the tune we must dance to. Unfortunately, we never have the opportunity to question his ownership of the yam and the knife, because he follows the law of the jungle while pretending to be domesticated. Just in case you've suddenly gone mad with thoughts of power, and have, as a result forgotten the location of Cameroon in The Continent of Surprise, permit me to express my disgust by reminding you that Cameroon is somewhere between West and Central Africa, that more than half its ten million people are below the age of 20, and that it has a lot of tourist attractions to offer potential holidaymakers and sun-seekers from every corner of the temperate world. In Cameroon, if tourists don't like what we have to offer, they are free to choose what they think we have but have failed to include in our menu.

The problem with those in charge of the tourism industry in Africa is that they tend to think one goes on holiday in order to find out

whether other countries have transplanted more or less the same architectural pattern, the same cuisine and eating habits, and the same life-style that one has in one's own country of origin. At least, this is the misconception most African elites have of the Westerner. Thus, in their various countries, the so-called elite approach the issue with a total misunderstanding of the European whom they've always claimed to know well enough. They construct the same hotels in the cities, with sophisticated swimming pools, tennis and golf courts, etc., all with the hope of impressing their Western tourists.

It doesn't occur to them that these are precisely the sort of similarities tourists are least interested in. One doesn't pay so much money just to find out whether or not Kinshasa, Douala, Lagos, Lilongwe and Nairobi are built like Brussels, Paris, London or New York. The villagers, their huts, food and ways, and their down-to-earth style of life are the aspects of Africa that interest Western visitors more. Not necessarily because this helps them confirm their idea of relative advantage and superiority, but because they want to rediscover what they have lost; or, in other words, what the peasants have preserved despite themselves. Thus my advice, to those in charge of tourism, would be that they should forget about the city and concentrate

their efforts and resources in the countryside. To understand what I mean, they must come to know the true Westerner, not the one they have constructed in their devious minds, who more often than not, is far from real.

My point made, permit me to resume the issue of sun-bathing and skin-tanning. Why do you think people here love to develop a tanned skin colour? The explanation could be that a tanned skin is a mark of class; there is a touch of class and relative advantage about everything people do, isn't there? A tanned skin can therefore be explained as follows: that one has been rich enough to afford a holiday abroad, where there is more sunshine than here. On the other hand, people wouldn't risk their health the way they do while sun-bathing if they weren't convinced a tanned skin is superior to a pink one. Whether or not these convictions are scientifically founded is an entirely different matter. Beliefs in one's superiority or the inferiority of others are seldom informed by science; which in a way explains why such beliefs (religious, political, cultural, etc.) are often repugnant to reason and common sense! This granted, how would you classify the various types of people you find in the world?

As far as I'm concerned, only one conclusion can be drawn. But before giving my point of view, I'd like to remind you of the

thousands of black men and women who strive to develop a lighter complexion with assorted skin-poisoning, cancer-causing, mercury-ridden toners and soaps, and who have devised hair-styles that bring them nearer to their ideal, which is white. Another point is that no matter the amount of bleaching cream the black man or woman uses, they can never attain their ideal. The complexion gets darker soon after application of these concoctions is discontinued. Same with the white, who would like to develop a permanent and lasting tan from sun-bathing alone. Taking the case of the White and Black races, I'm left with no doubt of their fundamental (be it covert and unconscious) recognition of the mulatto - hybrid between black and white - as the only possible lasting alternative to their ideal skin colour. It's ironic, won't you say? The black idealises the white skin, and the white idealises the black skin, each without acknowledging it. Because we are always pretending, especially those of us in power, people of both races try to make a secret of this fact. Remember that nothing can be hidden under the sun - not with a subversive philosopher around to uncover it!

Do you recall the Fox and Sour Grapes story? If you do, it would facilitate your understanding of the traditional antagonism between whites and blacks in this little world

of ours. Why do you think that the worst cases of racism in the world are those between whites and blacks? Let me explain. The very first whites to come into contact with blacks found a lot to admire in the latter, an admiration that has been passed down from one generation to another and that continues today. Most of all, the whites admired in the blacks the black skin that resisted the tropical heat in the American plantations, and that infused jealousy in the white male whenever the white female secretly admired the virility of the black male.

So the white man began to think seriously about the possibility of developing a similar resistant skin, if only for the sake of self-protection. But because he failed to succeed, he began to be antagonistic towards the black man, and his initial admiration was replaced by hatred and talk of sour grapes. Bitterly disappointed, he nursed his hatred and antagonism, which grew to take the form of an ideology; and most naturally, because the white man was in a position of power then (and still is today), he had the opportunity to transform his ill-feelings into a doctrine, which he disseminated the world over. Chiefly because he couldn't attain his ideal of a resistant skin like that of the black man, the white man rallied all those who were closer to him in skin colour or nose shape (Browns and

Yellows of Asia) to humiliate the black man, who became the common object of ridicule. To show his country's alliance with this classification of the races, a prominent Chinese scholar once wrote: "In China we have two attitudes to foreigners; we either look up to them as gods, or we look down to them as dogs." You can guess what the foreign gods and dogs of China are, can't you?

The white man's crusade against his black counterpart was conducted from all sorts of angles - religious, cultural, political, economic, etc. Have you ever stopped for a minute to ask yourself why everything negative tends to be associated with blackness, and everything positive associated with whiteness? Let me enlighten you before you are embarrassed with the question by one of your inquisitive children. You've heard of black magic and white magic, haven't you? You've told lies that were described either as white or black, haven't you? In primary school we both learnt of the black knight and the white knight, didn't we? You must be used to reading of black Mondays and black Thursdays in connection with major crashes in the money markets of Japan, Hong Kong, Europe and America. Of course, you know of terms such as blackmail, black propaganda, black humour, black comedy, black look, black cloud, black mood, black sheep, black market,

Black Death, Black Country... Why do you think that the whites have decided to conduct such a smearing and damaging campaign against a seemingly innocent colour - *black*? Why must everything negative, violent, harmful, sinister or antisocial be perceived as black? And why, for instance, must the first move in any game of chess be white? Of course, some would argue that all cultures have always associated black with despair and white with bliss. I don't deny that, but I do question the racist innuendos and Darwinian undertones that have perverted white utilisation of the symbolism. This, my dear Moungo, is no coincidence at all, but a well-calculated and institutionalised mechanism by the white to paint a shameful, inferior and unacceptable picture of his black rival. And how successful he's been! To the point that these racist terms are actually used by us blacks! A real case of Mimicry sans frontières! Nothing man-made is neutral, and this includes language...

On the other hand, the first black man who came into contact with the white man immediately took the white skin as his ideal. He knew that with the white skin went all sorts of advantages. His experience had taught him that with a white skin, no matter how frail one was, one could easily become a master, and be served instead of serve. One could also be rich,

live in a good house, ride a horse and be driven around in a coach or car to oversee the work in the plantations; one could manufacture the rifle; one possessed the secret of making the gun powder. One could challenge the local authorities, and de-legitimate kings in the territories where one chose to show that one had authority. Thus, they wanted the white skin for the power, authority and good life that the white skin symbolised. And whether as slaves in the plantations, or as toiling peasants in the colonies, white skin represented such power and authority to them.

While the white man admired black skin for being physically resistant (for physical power, if you prefer), the black man admired white skin, because with such a skin one could afford to be in control and authority, and to live in luxury without having to make a lot of physical sacrifices. Thus from the outset, the black man was there to make the good life possible, while the white man was there to enjoy it. This situation continues today. The black man does physically demanding activities, while the white earns money through him. Take sports – boxing, athletics, etc – where blacks dominate, and take music and dancing as well. What do you notice? White men, yes, white men as contractors, managers, promoters, all there to milk the blacks dry of their talents and earnings! Won't

you say that such exploitation is perhaps largely to blame for the heavy pressures which have pushed many a black athlete to stop at nothing, including drug-taking? Personally I see a strong connection, just as I do with most things.

As Basil Mathews remarked in *The Clash Of Colour*, the white man owes the soil of Africa and the labouring hands of the black “an inexhaustible catalogue of necessities”, ranging from the cup of coffee or cocoa, the box of chocolates and the bunch of bananas on the dinner table, to the timber for office furnishings, the ivory on knife-handles and billiard balls, the rubber on balls and tyres, the leather for shoes, bags and jackets, and much of the gold used as currency. But because the white man has both the yam and the knife, because his mission remains that of farming the world, he has never allowed the black the right to name the price of his physical exertion. Rather, he has always imposed his own price, one so low that the peasant, little wonder, has remained buried in misery. And so they toil till death, and their children take over, so that the white man must never know discomfort.

That's it for now about blacks and whites in love and hate. Now back to me for a while. I've left London and I'm safely settled in the city of Manchester, which, incidentally, is the third biggest in this country. School starts

in a couple of weeks, so I still have some time to acquaint myself with my new environment. You must have realised by now that I hate starting to tell a story from the end. So kindly permit me to begin at the beginning, which happens to be where I concluded my first letter.

By the way, how did you find my letter? A mixture of sense and nonsense, I suppose? I can imagine you saying, 'Charles, stick to a description of life in England; I know the Cameroonian situation already!' Do you know what I'd say if I were to receive a letter from you that bordered on such impertinence? I'd say I don't owe you any duty to write the way you please. Whatever gave you the idea that you could make me do what you want? Once more let me remind you: No amount of persuasion on your part would push me to abandon my style. Never! In case you didn't know, a man's style is his most prized possession. He who goes through life without a style of his own is as good as a person without a shadow. Come to think of it, I wouldn't be surprised by your attempts to make me alter my style. After all, that's what you and your leaders have succeeded to do to Africa: kill its uniqueness of style! You have defaced Africa and turned it into a mimicking continent. But you are not going to succeed

with me. Yes, that's what I'm telling you, so don't you dare send me any such letter!

However, bearing in mind what Frederick the Great of Prussia said, you can come to any conclusions you like, but I'll continue to write as I please. The worst you could do is refuse to read my letters; but stop me from writing them and writing as I please, you can't.

This point made, allow me to tell you, in a way unique to me, about some of the things you might be interested to know. I would start straightaway with what everyone does, but which I'm bent on not doing, during my stay in Her Majesty's Queendom. I must say I lack interest in most things that give pleasure to people here in the West, especially the Americans. In London I met three Americans who were armed with garlic and crucifixes, and determined to visit every single graveyard in this Queendom. The reason? They wanted to trace their ancestry, to establish where their great-grandparents must have come from. They would dig up every grave they suspect contains the remains of someone related to them, and would invite archaeologists to analyze and compare with them the fossil uncovered.

They love visiting museums and listed buildings as well, the Americans. They admire old houses and adore the villages of birth of

great English figures like Shakespeare, Dickens, Hardy, etc. Of what importance these places are, I really can't say. What importance or pleasure, I wonder, could be derived from knowing that a building is Tudor, Elizabethan or Victorian? What does it matter to me that a house is 300 years old, or that a table knife was once used by Cromwell to prune King Charles' head? To me, it only goes to show that the Americans had no reason for leaving Europe in the first place. See how nostalgic they are about sweet old Europe!

Not that they, the Americans, are finding it easy exploring and knowing this Queendom! My brief encounter with the three gave me a gist of the sort of problems they must be facing. The first and foremost problem is the names of places, and the loose manner in which the London masses speak the Queen's language. As you probably know, the English are notorious for writing one thing and saying another. Take a name like Leicester Square, for example. Like my American acquaintance, you'd probably tell a London cabdriver to take you to Lei-ces-ter Square. But if you did, the cabdriver would say "Sorry?" meaning you should say your destination again, because he didn't quite get you the first time. But I swear by Lucifer that you could repeat yourself the whole day, and not get any nearer being understood. The simple reason being that,

although the English might write Lei-ces-ter, they actually pronounce Lester. What a roundabout manner to make a point! Yet, before you start thinking there's a rule about it or that you've got the trick at long last, here comes Winchester to prove that the English are indeed "a pretty confused bunch." "Why Win-ches-ter instead of Winst-er?" you may ask, and be baffled like every other foreigner that has preceded you to Her Majesty's Queendom.

Although the Americans are far from being guiltless themselves, I would agree with my Harvard-trained acquaintance that you need to have a language degree from Oxford or Cambridge to understand an East End(London)er speak. The manner in which they cut out letters and trim words is such that if I didn't know a bit of French, I might indeed have thought they were speaking French! Thus, instead of saying for example, "In the city of London youngsters take a lot of drugs and the walls are covered in graffiti, an Eastender would say something to this effect: "E' ah c.e. o' Lo'on yong'as te'ha lo'o drugs an' a walls a' co'a'n graffi'hi." And it is said the deeper you penetrate the Queendom northwards, the graver the cutting and trimming. The American trio is certainly in for it!

Concerning museums, I've been to see quite a few. There is something Cameroonian in almost every one of them. But still, I don't find them any less boring. The only fascination perhaps is the virtual absence of anything English. The English seem to have specialized in collecting items from everywhere else but England, forgetting their museums are supposed to be national in name and content. But the Americans love them all the same!

There's an area called the Lake District. Everyone seems to recommend it to any foreigner they meet. The first thing a tourist is asked is whether or not he's been to the Lake District. "That's beautiful countryside. Simply magnificent. Oh, you must go there. You can't afford not to!" I wonder what treasure is there. But in a country so bedevilled by capricious weather, and the blunt or stiff humour of its inhabitants, much ado is likely to be made about trivia. So that's why I'm staying put. I don't want to venture there only to be disappointed. That's that about the likes of Americans. Now to what matters.

It won't be fair to Thomson and Thomson if I don't tell you about them. When I wrote to you the first time, I was so carried away by my rambling that I forgot to tell you of my two English friends. Thomson and Thomson are a pair of identical twins who are employed as cleaners at the Mandela Hotel.

We became acquainted when one of them said to me: "You're from Africa, aren't you?" I nodded, and he added, "I can tell an English black from an African, as soon as I see one." (I don't know how they manage it, but the other day at the post office an elderly woman made the same remark when I ceded my place in the queue to her.) I decided not to take offence because it seemed as if I could learn an awful lot about this society through chatting with these sleek fellows. Quite philosophical of me, won't you agree? But to tell you the truth, my lessons haven't been entirely pleasant. Thomson and Thomson are chronic viewers of television; they are as addicted to telly as you are to liquor. I spent most of the time with them in front of the 'silver screen.' I had no choice but to sit with them, glued to the box like a breast-feeding baby. This was good, and through it, I've learnt much about this Queendom and its weird humours. But there are one or two things concerning this circumcision rite, which I didn't find at all palatable, and which I don't think even you would stomach.

While promising to come back to the less palatable part of the initiation ceremony, permit me to say a thing or two about my TV lessons. One must say that something is good, when it is; no use lying and feeling jealous. As my late mother used to say, when a person is

bigger than you, accept the fact and bow to him in respect. The truth is, British TV is more than a giant. It is very informative to a young man from the "jungle of Africa," to borrow the words of a popular newspaper here. What I enjoy most are the commercials, which apart from being exceedingly amusing, keep me wondering if what I think they mean is actually what they are intended to mean. For example, in an advert about buying a car, I'm asked to hurry up because supplies are limited, and these cars cost *only* £3000 each. To me this means that if I don't want to own a car because I need it, I should at least own one because it would cost me a meagre £3000. Not only is it taken for granted that I have £3000 to spend, but also that because I don't really know what to spend this money on, I need the advice of people whom the devil seems to have assigned to take good care of my money. Take the case of a second advert that sounds like a real bonanza, whereby I'm told I can be paid a fathomless sum of money in part exchange for my old car, no matter how battered! Just like another, which promises to refund your money with interest, should you find cheaper anywhere in the market the goods they've sold you for almost nothing. Since Cameroonians worship suits, there is also an advert which promises you three free suits for every one you buy for £1000! The ads are so captivating to

watch, that I'm not surprised to learn they actually cost more to make than the bulk of programmes they interrupt.

In this way, advertising is presented like some sort of philanthropic Samaritan; a selfless, disinterested Father-Christmas committed to protecting the general public from unscrupulous swindlers. Quite amusing, wouldn't you say so? I wish the starving African masses could be flown over to this society where the problem isn't the means, but on what to spend the means. I wonder about the truth in the hearsay that there are certain societies where surplus grain and milk are poured into the sea for the sake of sustaining the spirit of competition amongst the members of the international community. Such societies would argue, and rightly too perhaps, that struggling people are best helped through teaching them how to fish, not by simply supplying them with tons and tons of fish. The unfortunate thing, however, is that this is easier said than done. Who would like to give up his means of power and superiority just like that? Most people would rather supply the fish than teach their dependents how to fish. I remember the story of the fellow who divorced his wife because she obtained a job of her own. Instead of rejoicing over the prospective increase in their family income, the husband had felt threatened, and had seen the wife's job

as an end to his domestic tyranny and gatekeeping. It's no secret that some people would have you as friend, only as long as you stay subordinate. The day you attempt to raise your head above their feet, the friendship will end.

The truly poor of this community, whom Her Majesty's Government has branded "the insignificant minority in a society of abundant opulence" are bound to feel gravely disappointed and accursed about the fact that they cannot attain the good life, which TV tells them is not only possible, but actually being enjoyed by everyone else. Another remarkable aspect of TV is what a learned African subversive would term "the desecration of the human body." The human body is highly commercialised in this Queendom. Whereas in Africa someone might go half naked because of want, people here, and in particular the women, are presented naked on TV, as if to say beauty is something a woman ought to display or make available to every male with hungry eyes. Nudity is a way of life, considered normal enough to be dished out on TV, or served in lavish extravagance by the popular papers. Women with scars on their legs, fat women, and ugly ones are bound to feel really rejected and underprivileged under Her Majesty's reign. I'm sure they would tell me there are also adverts on managing scars,

losing weight and being beautiful. Perhaps this excessive commercialization of the human body explains why the coverage of the famine in Ethiopia, in 1984, was so outrageously abusive of the human dignity of the starving peasants. Many of the photographs I've seen of this coverage betrayed a ruthless, wolfish, satanic inclination to make filthy capital out of the plight of the forsaken victims of depleted Marxism.

I know your love of football borders on the fanatical, like millions of others in our 'Playing Republic,' though your skill-lessness in the game is certified. Listen to what I've remarked about the mercenary treatment of footballers in this community. Inasmuch as they are widely applauded and respected by fans, they are treated as goods (stocks and shares) by the management; and as valid passports to vandalism or the re-enactment of the war-dances and violence of imperial England by hooligans. Here, footballers are also highly commercialized; they are bought and sold in the same manner that bags of coffee and cocoa are bought and sold by the Cameroonian authorities. In fact, everything in this society is seen in terms of Business – with a capital B. The Queendom is even likened to a marketplace, and leaders are perceived as salesmen or marketwomen who are each struggling to sell their parties and policies to

the electorate, who definitely have a plethora of choices to choose from. So that the electorate is not said to have voted, but to have bought the candidate who prepared the best political cup of tea for sale. No wonder people here love a plurality of voices. For isn't it logical that one can't really talk of a market, where there is only one trader selling only one type of commodity at his price? Perhaps we the alienating elite of Africa ought to think of borrowing this idea of a marketplace (which of course is well-embedded in our ethnic social systems); though a marketplace that is truly a marketplace, not a phoney. Anyway, that's that about learning from the TV for now. Let's turn to the other forms of initiation that I've undergone.

The very first thing Thomson and Thomson persuaded me to do was learn to play the electronic Fruit Machine or what is known here as the One-Armed-Bandit. If I had known right from the beginning that the machine was also known by the second name, I would have thought twice before accepting their invitation to play. But I didn't; so what happened, happened. For the first day or two, I watched Thomson and Thomson manipulate the One-Armed-Bandit with bewitching expertise. They won, not always, but often. I was inspired, and started to play the game on my own, when Thomson and Thomson were

away cleaning the Hotel rooms. But luck was hardly on my side. I seldom won. In fact, I never won.

However, the more I lost, the more I had the strong feeling that if I played again, I just might win. So I kept playing, and losing my money. And quite unphilosophically, I felt too ashamed to tell Thomson and Thomson about my failures. One curious thing with the One-Armed-Bandit is the irresistible opportunities he offers one to gamble the little one has won, or to offer tokens in place of real coins, so that one might continue to play. The temptation was more than I could resist, and I certainly might have won, had I paid little attention to the offers to gamble for more. Appetite grows with eating, I'm told, and how apt! Perhaps we all are capitalists; even those without the capital to do business.

The One-Armed-Bandit has just taught me the hard way what I didn't know about myself. How can I deny, again, the famous capitalist statement that we are basically accumulating beings? How can I criticize proponents of capitalism when they claim that even Marx, the Grandmaster of the Thinking Religion of the dispossessed, was guilty of this basic tendency? Aren't they right when they argue that the fame Marx failed to amass in wealth, he amassed in writings? If Marx was really the archenemy of Lord Greed (alias

Selfish Pursuits) as he claimed critics have argued, he would certainly have thought twice before writing alone all the volumes he wrote; he would have thought of other writers to come and should have left something for them to write in their turn, instead of plundering the realm of knowledge the way he did! Seen in this light, Marx and the One-Armed-Bandit would both appear to have one thing in common: Accumulation, selfish and greedy accumulation. They might overflow with wealth or fame, but they just can't say no to more!

Moungo, I know what you are thinking! I know that you're calling me a thief. Isn't that true, Moungo? Please tell me, don't shy away. Be a man. Whatever you're thinking, do bear in mind that one can be a thief without indeed being a capitalist. African leaders have practised the sort of theft whereby the thief sneaks in only when the crops are ready for harvest. Give these leaders fertilizers and high yielding varieties to encourage farmers, and they would either want to sell these to the peasants, or exchange them for money with the owners of huge multinational plantations. They are too greedy to think long-term! It simply doesn't click that the peasant would provide them with more to steal if the soil was improved, and if a better crop variety were used. It isn't a coincidence that these leaders

beg only in American dollars, English pounds, German Deutschmarks or French francs. Did it ever occur to you that this aid never leaves the donor countries, but that the money finds itself into one privatized account or another in Zurich, California, or elsewhere in the West? It is as if whenever an African President visits the West, it is to perform the two Bs: Beg and Bank. I read a newspaper report of an ordinary mad beggar at an International Airport somewhere in Africa, who would take nothing from the tourists except if it was in dollars, pounds sterling, Deutschmarks or francs! There you are, even the mad beggars of our cities now share our leaders' secrets!

The African elite today loves the kingly life so much that, at independence, what mattered to him most was political, not economic power. Economic power was largely retained by the Europeans and expatriates, which is why the leaders suck the peasants like ticks in order to sustain their kingly appetites. Had the African leaders been sensible enough to think seriously of economic power as well, African countries today would certainly not be this dependent upon the unmechanized efforts of the peasants. And they would also be in a position to carry out their own development efforts, without necessarily posing as "Les Mendiants du monde." "Beggars of the world,

unite," Marx is likely to have written, had he been born in Africa.

Perhaps the black man is inherently a power-monger. In this Queendom Afro-Caribbeans, more than any other immigrants, have championed the cause of political equality for ethnic minorities. Thus while the Asians have opted for the corner-shops and small-and-medium-size businesses – that is, while they have chosen to conquer injustice from an economic platform – the blacks have settled for barren rhetoric and sterile moralization. One can very easily see how the white man would find the Asians more of a threat than the Afro-Caribbeans, and it wouldn't be at all surprising if white racial attacks on Asians were higher than attacks on Afro-Caribbeans. Real power in a capitalist world is economic, not political.

But if you insist on calling me a thief, permit me to explain again how I came by the diamonds that have made it possible for me to come abroad for further studies. For one thing, I didn't steal them. I maintain what I told you, that these were a gift from my late Zairian friend and classmate. What did you expect a dying man to do? Ask to be buried with the diamonds he had hoped to sell and go to France? No, Mouno, Citoyen Kulu wasn't as mean as that. He knew that if he failed to go to France, I could succeed to Britain, which I did.

I was his best friend, wasn't I? That's why he left his diamonds with me. I haven't been all that mean with the diamonds, have I? Remember that a large part of your bank account has been filled by money from the sale of the diamonds. How good can one be expected to be in this world? I wish the African leader and elite was half as good! You must also remember what Citoyen Kulu told us: in Zaire, diamonds are as common as Mobutu's effigies. If he had obtained them illegally from a safe somewhere, the authorities would certainly not have allowed him to venture out of the country. Citoyen Kulu wasn't the type of person to take anything about which he hadn't a clear conscience. May God bless his tiny soul, and may the Leopard spare his carcass.

I hate to think that I'm using my late friend's fortune carelessly, to play games with One-Armed-Bandits. But believe me when I say I'll not do it again. Wherever I come across a similar machine that is built to legitimate theft and deceit, I'll turn my back on it and walk away fast, like a determined savage. For I have learnt that if you want to leave the One-Armed-Bandit with a small fortune, you must go there with a big one. Yet even then...

However, it's not only the One-Armed-Bandit that I was introduced to while in London. Thomson and Thomson are not the sort of persons that excel in mediocrity; when

they set out to have an African initiated, they mean to stop at nothing. In the evenings they took me down to the local pub, where I tasted English beer. Like Douala, London has a variety of beers brewed locally, with the exception of one only, Tusker, brewed and exported from the game reserves of Kenya. But unlike our own beer back home, the beers here are very low in alcohol content. Take Guinness, for example; a Cameroonian would need at least five pints of British Guinness, before he can say anything unintelligible.

Despite this advantage, the drinking laws here in London are too rigid. While in Cameroon drinking places are open almost all day (except of course when politicians are re-enacting one autocratic ritual or another), British pubs, of which there are no less than 75,000, open their doors an average of eight hours only. The argument here is that if people are permitted to drink all day, they may be drunk most of the time. An argument strengthened by a study, which shows that nearly 14 million working days, or £800m, are lost annually by industry due to booze. But still, this presupposes that people have the money to spend on beer, or lager, as it is generally called here. This isn't true at all. Not only does the beer here cost five times more than beer in Cameroon, but also, quite unlike in Cameroon, one cannot be allowed to drink

on credit. Here it is strictly payment before service, not like the cosy “give-me-I-pay-tomorrow” sort of thing for which Cameroon is renowned.

Thomson and Thomson are very cautious drinkers. They are equally careful about taking our friendship too far. Despite what they’ve done for me, they’ve consistently refused to have me reward them with a pint. “The practice here is for everyone to pay for himself,” they tell me, and would rather stay without a drink than accept my offer of one. No wonder only a British minister, like Lord Canning, could have said “Everyone for himself, and God for us all.” I’m a bit frightened by such thinking, because it presupposes that God never goes to sleep, and that if he did, only those who have enough to last the sleep would survive. I have a feeling that Thomson and Thomson completely ignore a basic human characteristic, whereby one just feels like sharing with others what one has, without necessarily thinking of being paid back. If we humans are unable to make certain basic sacrifices or to socialise, how sure are we that God is for everyone, God whom we don’t even see on a daily basis as we do our fellow man?

Thomson and Thomson also took me round London in their car, one of the 23 million active cars in the Queendom. I’m

scared of driving here! Can you imagine yourself suddenly expected to drive on the left hand side of the road? I for one would fumble to death. Yet not only do Britons drive fast and easy, they even have time to make love in their cars! A study shows that love-making in cars is very fashionable, with one in three road-users admitting to doing it. I'm amazed by the way Thomson and Thomson dart from side to side with the type of skill that I can only associate with Grand Prix Motor racers. It's all a question of sticking to what one is used to, isn't it? Strange how some of us are required to learn new ways of thinking, doing and feeling, everyday of our lives, as if we are being born again every blessed minute! That's the world, the world of the powerful!

The bizarre and the unexpected are never lacking in any society, no matter how much we try to idealise that particular society. Would you believe that there are mad white people, just as there are mad black people back home? I saw one with my virgin eyes, in a street of London, as he searched the dustbins for pieces of bread and rejected cans of food, in order to forage a meal for himself. At the same time, he muttered repeatedly: "Maggie...Mortgage...Maggie...Mortgage..." I suppose he had just lost his right as one of Britain's 9 million homeowners. Would you have thought that there are beggars here as

well? Believe it or not, I saw one in the subway nearest the Mandela Hotel. This particular beggar, who had spiky hair, even asked me for ten pence. "For a cuppa tea" he said. At first I thought he must be joking, or that he must be out to make a fool of me, but when he persisted, I offered him fifty pence and hurried away. And as I disappeared round the corner, I could feel his gaze on my back; probably he was thinking: "He's fuckin' new in town, that fella. He fuckin' well is!"

And there is the chronic problem of homelessness, too, people (the walking dead, the dispossessed, the underclass, the filthy and the abandoned, the non-persons, the voting zombies, call them whatever you like) who have nowhere to lay their heads at night! Imagine tens of thousands of such Britons (370,000 and 128,345 being the respective conservative estimates of homeless individuals and households in Britain, according to *The Independent* of 29/12/88), under-clothed even in their rags, and underfed as well, roaming the East End and West End of London like restless ghosts in Limbo, lost for where to go! Still, according to the paper, between 25,000 and 40,000 young people slept rough in central London in 1987 alone!

As bitter winters come and go, so the homeless of London die in their ever swelling numbers, without the rich and better-off of Her

Majesty's Queendom so much as lifting a finger to say, "hi brother, hi sister, be my guest tonight, in the name of God and humanity. You have the right to a smile just as I do. Cheer up, and share with us the Thatcher Revolution." Instead, so I've read and heard, even at Christmas, when Lord Greed himself was known to be generous, the better-off of London have carried their selfish self-interest to higher heights, preferring to spend Christmas indoors in the cosy company of family, friends and pets, rather than outdoors in the streets and bars where per chance the abject poor might pick up their crumbs or drain their dregs. Would you have thought that London, of all places, London, the greatest seat or museum of everything magnificent in human attainments, would be guilty of the vilest of earthly plagues - HOME-LESS-NESS?

Have you ever seen a white person cleaning his own house, or taking care of his or her own garden? Mouno, I really wished you were here to baptise your naivety and see things with your own eyes. What can I say? Where do I begin? I saw a white man with a broom, sweeping the streets of London, and I stood speechless, utterly speechless. In Africa, civil servants and others have houseboys, cooks, stewards, baby-sitters, house cleaners and arse cleaners. Once somebody has a job in town, he or she uses that as a passport to sit on

his less fortunate brethren. I know you would say this is because we learn from the dregs of European society, which landed on our shores as colonial masters. You will recall that children as young as ten and younger are employed to babysit for a family, while the senior children of that family attend school. No one stops to ask critical soul-searching questions, such as: "Where are my children heading when the children of others are less fortunate and unable to attend school? Can my children alone build a morally just and upright fatherland?"

However, whatever you might observe to be the practice in Africa, here things aren't the same. The white man washes his own car, cleans his house and garden, and cooks his own food. There is no question, so I hear, of a husband who sits conversing and sipping in the parlour while the wife struggles alone with the family cooking in the kitchen. No one would tolerate that. Everyone here is a person, pure and simple; there are neither husbands, wives nor peasants; just human beings equal in every respect. But because everyone in Africa wants the authority and power they were all denied when the white man was around, that perhaps explains why we still capitalize on such binary oppositions as husband/wife, man/woman, parent/child, elite/masses, citizen/paysan, leader/led, urban/rural

civilised/primitive. I'm not saying that oppositions have completely disappeared in this Majestic Queendom. Even a gullible idiot of your calibre wouldn't believe that, would you? But it is recognisable that this society is a long way ahead of ours in what concerns these apparently rudimentary yet complex forms of exploitation. As I'm going to argue later, that is, if I please, these elementary forms of exploitation have been replaced by more subtle ones that are not so easy to identify.

Thomson and Thomson are definitely friends I would like to keep. It's just a question of understanding them, and everything will be okay. It's said every now and then that one should do as the Romans do when in Rome. I promise to respect the Roman way of life, but on condition that this isn't a trick by the Romans to disseminate their culture and values to the rest of the world. In the past, when this idiom was forged, Rome was the centre of the world, and as with all such centres, everyone else went there but the Romans themselves hardly ever felt the need to go elsewhere, so they were hardly ever going to learn to behave the way other people did when not in Rome.

All said and done, Thomson and Thomson are my friends. I'm determined to maintain my friendship with them, though it's still impossible for me to say with precision

which Thomson is the one and which is the other. I know that one votes Labour and the other Conservative, but which is blue and which red I cannot tell. Only when they each put on T-shirts is it possible for me to say who is who, for one of them has a dragon tattooed on his right arm, while the other has a lion tattooed on his left arm. But the easy way about it is to address them as Thomson and Thomson, as I've learnt to do, with their permission. Sometimes I playfully address them as 'Gentlemen,' which they don't like very much, and I can see why, for they wear no hats, carry no large umbrellas about, and smoke cigarettes, not cigars or pipes.

However, they've told me a name they wouldn't mind to be called: YUPPIES. It sounds like puppies or hippies, but I can tell you that Thomson and Thomson beam with absolute satisfaction whenever I call them Yuppies. When I asked them what the name meant, they didn't quite seem to know. But they did make me understand that only someone young, upwardly mobile and professional would bear the name. Being young, upwardly mobile and cleaners by profession, Thomson and Thomson are a brilliant example of what I should look for in Yuppies. Two things, according to Thomson and Thomson (Yuppie and Yuppie), distinguish the Yuppies: Fast cars and fast

money. A Yuppie is therefore a young man or woman who sniffs up and down the city for money, riding or dreaming of riding in the sort of expensive cars that Presidents in Africa are known to disallow anyone else the privilege of riding.

Thomson and Thomson accompanied me to the Euston railway station where I boarded the train for Manchester. It was a most busy station, and I don't think I could have made it alone without the friendly pair of twins. At Euston people are constantly coming and going. Passengers have very little luggage by Cameroonian standards. Absent here are young unemployed ghetto lads with running noses, ready to snatch your bag or purse, and bolt. I can't say theft is completely absent in this society. Perhaps just other forms of it exist, such as the One-Armed-Bandit I've described. There is bound, as well, to be theft like that practised by African leaders, whereby someone slices the budget by half into his bank account in Europe, but makes much ado about a starving youth who steals a penny just to free himself from the mouth of death.

Without having been here for long, I've already coined an expression of my own. Isn't that great? If I continue in this way, I'll be able to write a book on philosophy by the time I defend my thesis. I've coined the expression "P Civilisation" to refer first to the plastic cards

people carry about in place of money, and second, to the excessive presence of vendor and other machines where one is asked to slot in a series of coins, before services are rendered.

Concerning the first point, I can assure you that there is no possibility of enriching oneself in this society by waylaying or assaulting a millionaire. All you'd get would be plastic cards! In Cameroon, you might break into a rich man's mansion to stop the strangulating grip of poverty, but here, what do you do with stolen plastics whose codes you ignore? Plastic money has rendered the rich unassailable, and has made it much easier for a Pharisee to get a place in Heaven than for a poor Briton to become rich by theft. While the rich of Africa line their pockets with bank notes, the rich of England fill their wallets with Service Cards, Cheque Cards, Flexible Access, American Express, Barclay Card, etc.

Even with the public cash dispenser - 'service till'- used by banks and building societies, there is no luck either. A poor man can pray and hope for a miracle, but his prayers and hope would come to nothing. There is almost no chance that the machine can suffer fits of generosity by doling out more than you ask for, or more than is in your account. Yes, it happened once in London, only once. That was many years ago. Thomson and

Thomson were nearby, and heard of the till that had gone crazy and was paying people ten times more than they had asked. To the till they had scrambled for their share of the windfall. But their luck was very shortlived indeed; for that same evening, no sooner did they sit down over a pint to celebrate than the TV announced that the bank's central computer had successfully traced the transactions and debited the extra cash from customers' accounts. How Thomson and Thomson regretted wasting the accursed money on lager!

Now to the second meaning. My sense of awe has been thrilled by various experiences with the Penny Machines. In the local pub where Thomson and Thomson have taken me for days, if one needs music, one is expected to slot in coins. Without which there is no music. The same with such strange games like Snooker, Pool and computer driving competitions; no coins to slot in, no pleasure. You have yourself to blame for not playing, not the pub owner. He has done his best to satisfy you by thinking of all you need to make you happy, so why blame him if you fail to slot in the coins to have the pleasures you want? Same with the toilets: no Ps, no ejection of the waste in your bowels or bladder! I haven't yet met the persons who, rumour holds, need ten P slotted into their mouth before they can say

“Mornin” or share a smile. But I’ll tell you when I find one. It’s the P Civilisation I came here to acquire, so I may well have a doctorate in it. Philosophy knows no bounds, does it?

Moungo, believe me when I say the P Civilisation has made this society too different from ours. Imagine the way civil servants make abuse of the telephone back home in Cameroon! Imagine how secretaries spend hours on the telephone, chatting about nothing, but giggling about everything. Well, to tell you the truth, even if the civil servants in this country decided to ignore the government’s advice to avoid waste and irresponsible consumption, they wouldn’t succeed, not only because BT (British Telecom), is a private company, but also because everyone is forced to pay as they use it. No public telephone would work unless you slot in a coin, and the more time you spend on it, the more money you have to slot in beforehand. Here the individual is totally deprived of the opportunity to practise the petty tricks that are so widespread in African societies and just as quickly deplete African installations. The government in this country is very caring in providing all the public amenities its people want, but the only problem is this tendency to take for granted that everyone has these pennies to slot in.

Perhaps this tendency has its *raison d'être*, for even the unemployed of the society are paid a wage of some sort. This is called unemployment benefit, or dole, not dupe - mind you! But I'd rather you consider it as some sort of pay for inactivity. If ever African countries hope to attain this level of social welfarism, if ever we in Africa hope to bring about a civilisation identical to the Plastic or Penny Civilisation, we must stop stealing and start gathering our resources together for collective use. We also have to stop eating and start saving, not abroad, but within our very own countries. At the moment, we Africans are simply a laughing stock; our excessive tendency to consume so much and save so little, to produce so little within and depend so much on what is produced elsewhere, has fettered us with the chains of ultimate devastation. Pray for Africa, Moungo, I beseech you. Become a Born Again Christian, if that would make God hear your wailing better.

I wished Thomson and Thomson goodbye and took my seat on the InterCity train to Manchester. That was Wednesday last. Throughout the journey, I didn't sweat at all. Not because my sweat glands have stopped misbehaving, but because it's autumn here, and most importantly, because the train was spacious and comfortable. It was the first time I've taken a train in which every passenger had

a seat, and where overcrowding and jostling seem like the remote characteristics of an unknown planet!

Strange how these people keep to themselves. It borders on the ridiculous! They all sit tight-lipped, reading newspapers that have more photographs than writing, or looking at the beguiling scenery as the fast train speeds away through a countryside worthy of biblical fantasy. Rarely do you hear anyone talk to another. What an ideal atmosphere to make a perfect recording of the sound of a moving train! Were I blind, I might think their lips are actually stitched or glued together, to stop them from speaking and feeling warmth.

Once in a while the conductor says something about the next station of call or the buffet bar, but apart from that, nothing. It seems as if they would lose part of their pride and dignity if they talked to anyone. The fear of uttering an indiscretion? Perhaps. Even the babies seem to know this just too well, for not a single sound comes from them either! Strange indeed, the devilish stillness of the English! It makes your hair stand on end as if you were in the company of Count Dracula and his horde of blood-sucking fiends! Imagine this young man who sat opposite me throughout the journey; not a single word from him! He completely took me for granted, no sense of

curiosity whatsoever. A strange people, this! And the girl who sat adjacent to me. At first I thought she was a bit shy to start chatting with someone she didn't share the same skin colour with. But no, far from it. She would not even reply when the elderly lady who sat to her left asked her for the time.

I counted them, with my eyes alone, and there were more than 20 people in all listening to music from their walkman cassettes. No wonder a recent study has noted a high incidence of defective hearing amongst the young of this society. That's the rapping price they have to pay for deciding not to talk to anyone. What else could I do but stare out through the window? I hadn't thought of buying a newspaper or taking a book to read, because I supposed the people might want to chat. But how mistaken to think so Cameroonian in England! I admired the scenery and 'villages' as the silent train raced on, until I could watch no more. Villages are in quotes because I consider the term a misnomer as far as the places I saw are concerned. How can you call a place with well-macadamised roads and streets a village? How do you refer to a community with adequate electricity and shops of its own as a village? Is it right to talk of a village when the houses are better constructed than most in any Cameroonian city? These aspects, and many more, make me

consider the term village a misnomer to these English settlements. I'm yet to see a genuine village in England; for how can there be a village independent of the hardship we know back home? A Cameroonian villager is bound to feel insulted by the English concept of village.

Fed up with the atmosphere in the train and tired of watching the scenery and 'villages,' I allowed my thoughts to proceed to Manchester, where I had never been. What could I think of? London, of course! Just as I thought of Douala when I tried to imagine what London would look like. And I wasn't far off the point. Manchester might be smaller, but it definitely has a lot in common with London. When I arrived in Manchester, I found a middle-aged woman with my name on a placard. At first it didn't occur to me that she was waiting for me, so I thought she had come along to demonstrate against my coming to Manchester. Paranoia, you may say, but everything is possible when you travel, Mounjo. I may not be as insignificant as you've always encouraged others to think! It just happens that I'm known here already. Not the type of pomposity of African leaders, who go around the world shouting, "I'm President, I'm Minister, I'm Director, I'm Professor, I'm Dr, etc." Do you recall the story of the African minister who went to a bank in New York to

withdraw money and to go shopping with his concubine? Yes, the minister who wanted to jump the queue, and when he was reminded to take his place, retorted "I'm minister in my country." The Americans were furious, and tossed him to the tail end of the queue, to learn to practise the very democracy, tolerance and equality of opportunities that are supposed to have accounted for his being a minister.

The middle-aged lady was Professor Redhead's personal secretary. She had come to receive me in his stead, the Professor having insisted on staying in his office to finish the last chapter of a book he is writing. The secretary gave me a lift in her car. Imagine a secretary with a car in our modest republic! Yes, it looks as if cars are damn cheap here! No wonder there are 23 million active cars in this Queendom! Almost one car for every two Britons. As soon as I settle down and know my right from my left, I'm likely to enter the second-hand car business, and start cleaning the streets and junkyards of England for the benefit of Cameroon. In that way, in the next 20 years or so, it would no longer be amazing to hear of a secretary with a car. Do you really think a philosopher like myself ought to go against what he preaches?

Talking about cars, perhaps you may like to know that these aren't exactly the same as cars in Cameroon. What I've remarked here

is that cars tend to be as compact as possible. Very few of them have more than two doors. Often, there is only room enough for the owner and another person - probably the girlfriend, the boyfriend, the dog or the cat. (Incidentally, the English spend far more a year on their dogs and cats than most governments in Africa do on their people. Statistics exist if you are interested.) Even families tend to buy this type of cars, which means that every time someone has to be let into the back seat, the person in front must stand out to make way. You can guess that the general attitude would be to offer no one a lift, unless that person was desperately close, and those who are that close, also happen to be those who sit on the passenger seat. People generally feel that to know more than one person intimately is cumbersome, a sort of cardinal sin even. Remember the English saying that two are company, and three are a crowd? Know that a saying like that couldn't have come out of the blue; nothing ever does.

This issue of cars with a single pair of doors has reminded me of the tastes of Cameroonian women. You are aware that to be a successful businessman, I need to know the tastes of my potential clients. And it doesn't sound as if cars with only two doors would sell well in Cameroon. Apart from the fact that families are almost unavoidably extended back

home, there is also the question of taste amongst Les Évolués. I'm particularly reminded of the girl who refused to go out with Steve, because the latter rode an inexpensive "Come-out-I-enter" (Volkswagen). She wouldn't bear to be seen in a car where a third passenger can't be let in without another getting out to make way. If ever I decide not to practise what I preach, I would think of 'le goût des Évolués' before venturing into business.

Professor Redhead's secretary is called Cathy. Her real name is Catherine, but she prefers Cathy because "this is sexier." She is very kind to me. She has asked me not to hesitate to bring my problems to her; any problem at all, so long as it hasn't to do with money. At first I smiled, because, this being a society where one needs money to do virtually everything (the P Civilisation), for someone to promise to help solve your problems in every way but financially, sounds like making no promise at all. But I believe her offer to be genuine and well-intended, even if not exactly thought out. She is out to help me, and all through my stay, I shall do my desperate best to have a problem that isn't financial, so that she could be importuned to fulfil her promise. I need God's committed assistance to succeed in a task this onerous.

Meanwhile, we drove to the flat Cathy had secured for me. It is nice, spacious and slightly too much for me alone. Given that I've never lived in a sophisticated house before, I'm slightly nervous in my present accommodation. But my landlady is kind, reassuring, and not presumptuous. She takes time to explain everything. I must say that she rather overdoes it; perhaps because she thinks that someone ignorant in one thing is necessarily ignorant in every other. Sounds like once a baby, always one, doesn't it? But by and large, she is kind and well-intentioned. It hasn't taken me long to start confiding in her. She was the person who advised me what bank to choose, though I declined to tell her how much diamond money I had in travellers cheques. It may well be that she isn't like my landlady back home in Douala, who always insisted I paid my rents three months in advance, as if she feared she might arise one hot day to find I'm gone forever. So far I'm paying her on a weekly basis, in pounds sterling, the Queen's currency, stable as an oak, defiant as the monarchy. Although the amount is triple what you pay for a bigger house in Cameroon, my flat is a hundred times better constructed than yours. Relative advantage and superiority again, isn't it? Would you argue when next I say that I'm ahead of you on the unique path to civilisation?

You may giggle when I tell you how embarrassed I was in front of the coffee machine for the first time. But I've learnt to use it before you. You may mock me when I narrate how I got lost in a supermarket, because I failed to distinguish between the entrance and the exit; or how I didn't know how to use my service and credit cards. But, again, I've found out, and long before you, if ever you would. Laugh if you like, about how I went shopping and lost my way, and consequently had to report at the nearest police station. Sneer if I say that my landlady has virtually turned me into an adopted chimpanzee, who must be taught how to eat, play, empty the bowels, sleep, wake up, dress and drink a nice cup of English Tea. All these are part of the price you shall one day be called upon to pay, if you wish and hope to capture the slippery reins of the P Civilisation. And do you reckon I'd stand waiting for you to catch up with me? You must be joking, my friend. Were I to do that, the whole theory of relative advantage and superiority would grind to a miserable halt like a Third World economy! I'll never wait, not even for a friend like you. No one has ever waited, why should I?

Strange place this, Moungo. The market is peculiar; you pay what you are told to pay. There is no haggling of any sort. How do I know whether I've been cheated or not? Back

in Cameroon we normally know that the price one is asked to pay is an introductory one, an offer, if you please. The buyer then weighs the possibilities, studies his or her list of opportunity costs, and offers what he or she thinks the item in question is worth. But quite unlike the situation in Cameroon, here the seller is alone in determining the price of an item, which he then imposes on the buyer. I honestly prefer the Cameroonian system of bargaining, not only because of the equal opportunities it offers the buyer and the seller, but also, and most importantly, for the occasion it gives the two to interact - to talk intimately with each other and to develop a sort of interpersonal relationship. The market here lacks warmth. In fact, the salesmen and women are no friendlier than the computers they use. Robots would not perform any worse. The Japanese, world leader in robot technology, would surely attest to this.

Talking about friendliness, the first impression I got was quite misleading. I came over from Cameroon with this idea of shaking hands when welcoming someone, or when wishing someone farewell. But imagine how frustrated I've been on countless occasions. No one here offers to shake hands with me. At first I thought it was something wrong with me as a person, my coarse hands perhaps; but now, I've come to realize that shaking hands simply

isn't the English way of expressing warmth. Since I discovered this, I've learnt to walk with my hands in my pockets, to avoid embarrassing anyone I happen to be introduced to. But the English have replaced handshaking with a series of terse expressions: "Hi", "Hello", "Hiya", "Pleased to meet you", "Y, meet X, X, meet Y", "Mornin'", "How do you do", "Bye", "Cheerio", "Cheers", and so on. Everyone seems too busy to stop and exchange a word or two in earnest. Yesterday, I was shocked when Cathy, Professor Redhead's secretary, didn't stop to greet me when I went down to the department. Later, when I caught up with her, she said she didn't want to disturb me. How on earth can a kind "Goodmornin' Charles. Did you sleep well?" be disturbing to a lonely African philosopher? Strange! Aristotle once said that there was always something strange coming out of the African darkness. How I wish he were here today to revise the statement from *Semper aliquid novi ex Africa*, to *Semper aliquid novi ex Europa*.

But I think something is wrong with me all the same. There is definitely something about me that repels the people I meet here. Can you divine what's been happening ever since I arrived at Manchester? I've remarked that whenever I take the bus and occupy a seat, no one else will sit by me if he or she can avoid

doing so. At certain times I'm so embarrassed that I feel like jumping out of the window and walking home, which is what I'll soon be doing once I know the city well enough. The other day, I was the very first passenger on the bus. I took a seat by the window, and avoided looking at the men and women as they came in, hoping and praying that one of them might just come over and sit by me, to save me the mental tortures of trying in vain to guess what in me chases these people away. But no one did, not even a fellow male. They occupied all the seats in the bus, except the one next to me. I began to fidget and sweat profusely, and to wonder what on earth had suddenly gone amiss with my face. When the bus at last came to the stop where I had to come out, I heaved a sigh of relief, jumped down on the pavement, and hurried home, wiping my sweaty palms with the handkerchief I bought at Marks and Spencer's (alias Saint Michael). At home, I went straight to the bath and examined my face in the mirror, but couldn't find anything wrong. Later, my landlady tried to explain that it is probably because I'm a stranger. If that is the case, I still don't understand why these people should choose to frustrate foreigners in this manner. To tell you the truth, I'm beginning to be scared and to feel lonely already.

Back to the market, I must confess the salesmen and women have quite their own brand of friendliness though. It is the type of friendliness that I find rather difficult to swallow, perhaps because I'm a foreigner. Every shop I enter, I'm addressed "Yes, Sir, what can I do for you, Sir?" in a voice that sounds like a tape recording. And when I've bought an item (whose prices have the unusual tendency to end with the figure .99), I'm invariably given a dry "Thank You," which is often said with the least possible effort, and which sounds bland and impersonal as if from the computer. Honestly, I would rather do without such a forced attempt to be polite and friendly.

Incidentally, I've been reading through the sociological impressions of a certain Jean-Marie Cochon, who claims to have an explanation for this type of politeness in England. To him, people in this Queendom have such a sensitive nose for money that they would go on all fours to have more and more of it. Accordingly, calling you 'Sir' adds nothing to your person, if you don't believe that you deserve it. In fact, there is every indication that the 'Sir' addresses the wallet more than it does its owner. It's money they respect, not the people that carry it. In any case, perhaps you really ought to do your best to come over, if you want to be addressed 'Sir' by

a white man. But also remember to steal a lot of money, which of course is the price you have to pay for such a rare privilege. Your leaders have paid it; you won't be the first.

Jean-Marie Cochon, who is a French sociologist of international standing, also seems to think that the outward show of politeness by the English masks a whole volcano of aggression. Most humoristically, he thinks that in this society, it is possible to find someone who smiles with you, says 'thank you' a million times, addresses you as 'Sir', and 'pleases' you with the refinement of a gentleman or lady, but who also wouldn't hesitate to cause a fight during a football match, kill every other claimant to the family silver, rape innocent school girls, assault pregnant women and savage old-aged pensioners, break into safe deposits and commit burglaries, import and distribute cocaine with impunity, conduct spanking sessions with vulnerable youngsters, and carry out mass and horrendous killings in the streets. Apart from the fact that people elsewhere are likely to behave similarly, I hate to have others' judgments and prejudices influence me, even if those impressions are by as renowned a swine as Jean-Marie of France. I'll make my own judgments and communicate them to you in due course.

I don't know if Jean-Marie Cochon has also written about what I have to say next. I've remarked that the elderly in this Queendom are friendly beyond belief; they smile from the heart and are quite sympathetic. They don't grin as others do; they smile. I mean it, they actually s-m-i-l-e. I'm happy, and often answer their smiles genuinely. Perhaps they see the tropical brilliance and warmth on my face, and react to it with the proven instincts of a fading generation. With them I feel confident and reassured. On one occasion where more than seven elderly women smiled at me, I felt so reassured that I went straight home and consulted my mirror, to find out what had changed. Nothing, mine was still the same old charcoal-dark face. Only different sets of people reacted differently to it. The younger generation tended to reject me, whereas the older experienced generation was more accepting.

I know that a sociologist like Jean-Marie Cochon will start looking for some bizarre explanation, if he hasn't already. He is likely to say the elderly are friendly with me because they are lonely, neglected by their children and grandchildren, forsaken by the TV which has very few programmes of interest to them, underestimated by the authorities, and threatened by death. He might even claim that these old men and women are just as warm

and friendly to their pet dogs and cats. All they need, in fact, is some person or some animal that makes them feel less forgotten and less overburdened by solitude. He might argue, with the eloquence of a galvanised frog, that the same elders who are being treated as dregs of a past and forgotten era and who are perceived as a burden on the active population, are the same people who 50 years or so ago cultivated similar attitudes which the present generation have merely inherited. They are paying for the mess they instituted, Mr 'Swine' is likely to conclude. God damn him! What matters to me is the fact that I've found a group of people who are willing to make me feel human too. And Jean-Marie Cochon may well go to hell with his analyses! Serves him right that no English man or woman pays a dime to his froggy pigheadedness!

I went to church on Sunday, but it took me long to find one, and when finally I did, it wasn't even our traditional Roman Catholic Church. Churches are very scarce here, and the Catholic Church even scarcer, our Papa for Roma being an unknown quantity in this Queendom. Don't be misled to think that Britain is like Africa, where there is a church in every village, or where a leader would wilfully starve millions of peasants of basic subsistence just to save £100million for the construction of

the Basilica of Our Lady of Peace. In Africa, peasants might lack farm to market roads, they may not have potable water and electricity, they may be wanting in schools and hospitals, but their church is never a mile or two away from home; and every Sunday, they go there to worship God, and to ask him a few pertinent questions if allowed by the Priest or Pastor. But, as you know, the Pastor and the Priest, like all the powerful, claim to know overmuch, most particularly, when it comes to the illiterate masses (who can neither read nor write the language of God's message). May God bless these underlings of history, betrayed by their own leaders.

Here the church is Anglican, the church which King Henry VIII of England created when the Pope in Rome dared to contest his authority and right to love the woman of his choice. Where would the African find himself if he dared even to let the hierarchy of the church understand that far from being a sorcerer or the Anti-Christ, the African healer and diviner is the person who for centuries has saved the community from total annihilation? He is out to take care of the wretched of the earth, promised a world hereafter that has no bearing with present tribulations. How can a people without hospitals be told to reject the only practice which guarantees them the barest minimum in health and life? How can

individuals who don't know what it means to live in the village, closest to all the hazards of nature, expect to understand the villager's problems better than the villager? Just how can you say how or where a shoe pinches, when you're not wearing it? Yet Archbishop Milingo of Lusaka, the god-sent Messiah of the forsaken and the overburdened African peasant, was disgraced by his Eminence, the Bishop of Rome, for daring to be useful to his flock. Nothing has ever embittered me more!

What a stigmatised God this must be, to whom the Africans are forced to go in a particular way following a pre-selected footpath? Did the Almighty prescribe wheat and wine from the vineyards of Europe, as the only symbolic substitutes of the body and blood of the slain Lamb of God? If He did, was He conscious of the effect this could have on the depleted economies of those countries that don't produce wheat and grapes? Does it mean that the Catholic Mass would come to an end, were the world to cease production of wheat and grapes? What is wrong with bread made from maize, or with wine made from the palm or raffia? Just why are God's Polished Pillars on earth so wicked that they slaughter our miserable peasants, then proceed to chop off their arms and limbs? Hasn't the African died enough? Isn't the peasant dead and buried yet?

Here, people are more concerned with the things that matter in life, than with going to church or worrying about the life hereafter. Only the unemployed or those unconcerned with active production go to church on Sundays. I went to church and found out for myself. Over 90 per cent of those who come to church are elderly. They enjoy what they do, because it whiles away time. Strange how things change, isn't it? When one recalls it was from Europe that the church was brought to Africa, it is difficult to reconcile this with the fact that only 6 per cent of the population in this country go to church. Great churches and cathedrals that once were known and venerated throughout this Queendom and beyond, are being rapidly converted into flats, safe havens for secular and sensuous pursuits by sinners with money enough to challenge God's authority. I witnessed one of these transformations in progress, and remarked with awe how the statues of Christ, the Virgin Mary and other heavenly bodies were being dismantled from the walls and shattered into little bits and pieces!

The church has been buried here, but it's just being born again in Africa. With over 300 million Christians, Africa is undoubtedly the most christened continent on earth. What has befallen God's Europe of old? The Europe, which, many decades ago, invaded African

values and beliefs with the aggression of locusts, preaching how only Christianity and Commerce could pave the African's way towards divine salvation? The P Civilisation is a wonderful thing, isn't it? I'm so worried that by the time we finally take off and arrive at the much prophesied Development, it might not be worth writing a long letter home about. God forbid. The truth in the world seems to indicate that the more materially well off one is, the less worried and the less insecure one feels, and consequently the more unconcerned with matters of religion and morality one becomes.

Apart from going to church or to the city centre, I've also had the opportunity to come to know Professor Redhead better. He is a cheerful man who seems well adapted to the society in and about which he philosophies for daily bread. His sense of humour is equally well sharpened, like Bertrand Russell's. When I met him for the first time, he apologized for being unable to come for me to the train station himself, but said he had stayed behind to complete his farewell to Marx. "If I'd been alive at the time Marx wrote what he wrote, I would have predicted his doom there and then," said he. "He was bound to fail. Absolutely. How could a man violate human instincts with such savagery, and expect to be well received! Man," he stressed, "is basically a grabbing animal. Marx's failure lies in thinking

that this essential nature of man's could be changed!" It appears I can't keep avoiding Marx. I may be forced to read him, if I have to determine whether or not Professor Redhead's critique is appropriate and academically tenable. But I'll do my best to avoid doing what I'm so reluctant to do.

Professor Redhead is married with two children, or rather, kids. His wife and kids were in when I visited. But I was treated as the professor not the family's visitor. Because of this, neither of the children saw why they should offer me their seat. So I sat on the carpet, and neither the Professor nor his wife found anything unusual with my sitting on the floor with the family cat and dog while kids maintained their seats. Isn't it the practice back home for juniors to offer seats to their elders? And I'm pretty sure that had I been foolish enough to let Professor Redhead read my astonishment, he would jolly well have asked me to stop making such a fuss about what was normal. Until now I thought it was an abomination the world over for a child to show such disrespect for age. But you haven't heard the worst yet. Here children call their parents directly by name. It isn't uncommon to hear a child shout "John, Mike, James, Jones, Paul, Pete...", referring to the father. Same thing with the mother. Yet I would never forget how the whole village punished me when, as a

child, I had dared to call my mother by name. As the English themselves admit, life is larger than logic.

This very morning, I went down to the department to find out if there are any other Africans around. I have found no one yet, though I've been told of some, and that many more are on their way here. Apparently, English universities, forced by increasing cuts in government subsidies, have launched an aggressive campaign abroad, aimed at wooing or attracting foreign students, especially from the Third World. Here, we pay at least six times the fees paid by a home student. It worries me, the mediocrity, which such commercialisation of education could engender. There is a risk of these universities becoming more interested in numbers and rapid graduation than in the quality of training or degrees delivered. Pray God I leave before the deluge, that at the end of my course I am not worse off than I was at the beginning.

When I returned from the department, I told my landlady my room is too large for me, and that I would like to share it with another student from Africa. "Do you intend to marry her?" she asked. "No, Madam," I said, "I mean a male student, not a female," I corrected. For a whole minute and half, she went red, pinkish red. I was at a loss for what I had said wrong, to make her blush so. When she recovered, she

wobbled away without a word. Later, I was in my room writing down impressions, when she walked in without knocking. She didn't wait for me to offer her a seat either, although she had impressed on me the idea that no one in England would assume a seat unless formally asked to. I stopped writing and turned towards her. She was eyeing me with hostile curiosity. Perplexed, I just sat, unable to look at her directly in the face. These people have an uncanny ability to stare right into your eyes like crime investigators. I thought that this was the wrong time for me to tell her a little story of how back in Cameroon, it is impolite to abandon your eyes in someone else's.

"I don't know you that much, Charles," she spoke at last. "But I suppose you know in this country young men don't share flats?"

"Really?" was my reaction, which didn't sound at all convincing.

"You are no uphill gardener, are you?" she asked, staring at me through her goggles.

I looked bewildered. What could she be on about? What could I have done to upset her Englishness of being? No clue.

She stood up, her eyes fixed on mine. "I hate shirt tail lifters," she said calmly, like someone trying hard to control a stormy anger. Then she left the room with the same abruptness she invaded it. Halfway down the stairs she said in a loud voice, "I'll talk to you

later, Charles. My suspicions may be wrong," she added. "They better be." After an hour or so she came back full of apologies, and telling me how she had thought that Africa was just like England, but that her friend and neighbour, an old lady who had lived in Kenya all her youth, had corrected her misgivings. I was relieved to hear that I hadn't committed an abomination. I was in the clear. Despite her apologies, my landlady still insisted that I mustn't share my flat and bed with another chap, no matter how friendly or pan-Africanic we claimed we were.

There's another aspect of this landlady of mine that I don't fully understand. When I first came she referred to me as "M'Love." Then, I thought this a compliment with special meaning. I was wrong, for no sooner than I had settled down, did I realise that she also called her cat and dog "M'Love," and treated them with such warmth and affection that I was jealous. How can this kind lady use the same interjection for humans and animals, with such indiscriminate ease? Is there really no difference between a cat, a dog and a student from Africa? Perhaps she uses it just as anyone else would use his or her swear word. Don't judge her harshly, Mounjo, for it might well be that I've totally misconstrued her. Be patient. I'm here to learn, am I not?

I'm struck by the conspicuous absence of literature on the English way of life by Africans who have been here before me. Is it possible that they might not have found a thing peculiar enough to write home about? Could they have totally suppressed their differences so easily, and picked up the Englishness of life without the least cultural crisis? It's utterly unthinkable. Maybe they simply felt too ashamed about expressing their feelings, lest they be termed "the primitive natives from the jungles of the Dark Continent." (Did I mention in my last letter the insolent teenager who asked me in hackneyed fashion: "In Africa you live in treetops, don't you?" to which I replied instinctively: "Yes, and the British Embassy is in the tree next door?") No wonder some Africans who venture over here are so anxious to free themselves of this image that they opt for total change at any cost.

In their desperate search for self-mutilation ('change' if you prefer), they soon discover that they've outdone even the English in their attempt to be English. They become the first to talk of Africa as "the Jungle, the bush, the primitive, the uncivilised" continent. They amaze the whites in their criticism of the poor peasants whose toil and sweat fuel their expensive climb into prominence. Those students sponsored by

their home governments say the most scandalous things about these poor innocent folk back home. They don't even stop to think that it is thanks to the peasant's coffee, cocoa, tea, cotton and groundnuts, thanks to the peasant's selfless sacrifices and drudgery, that they are being educated abroad, moulded, as it were, into blood-thirsty vampires. Tell me how the country can hopefully rely on such individuals for positive change? Aren't we heading for what the English have aptly termed "from the frying pan into the fire?" I really pity our situation. It wouldn't be too pessimistic to claim that even the Almighty will not find it an easy task, resolving the entanglements of Africa. Maybe the best thing to do in these circumstances is to destroy the present generation and create an entirely new set of beings who must be socialised from zero, and who must avoid the West like a plague, in order to be authentic and successful in a different but necessary sort of way.

Miss Cathy is a cultured secretary, very cultured indeed. Pardon me for failing to say this right from the beginning. Since for several years she has been reading through most of Professor Redhead's controversial papers and conservative publications, Cathy has forcibly developed a remarkable appetite for the written word. She might belong to what they pejoratively call the 'working class,' but she

reads far more than most of those who belong to the middle and upper classes. Without actually setting out to self-inform, I've been forced to know that class membership in this country is ascriptive rather than by individual achievement and effort; which I must say, is a grave contradiction, coming from a society that purports to be founded on the unhindered ability of the individual to seek the best possible world for himself. If one is born tainted by the diseased blood of working class parents, one is doomed to die a working class millionaire. Riches are not all that there is to class in this country. So let not our African kleptocrats think they would be recognised here, once they bring their millions to invest and revamp the British economy. Of course, being from an African royal family, dead and buried though this may be in modern times, you understand that such ascriptive membership is in line with what used to happen in pre-colonial Africa. Blue royal blood was an important determinant, in the same way that class blood is in Her Majesty's Queendom.

Forgive my digression. I was talking about Cathy, wasn't I? Miss Cathy, I should say. Yes, she is a Miss. Don't be surprised that a middle-aged woman should be a Miss here. Cathy has been married before, not once, not twice, but thrice. So she told me, after reading

one of my short stories 'The Polygamist.' She got divorced from her third husband because he met another woman he claimed to love slightly better than he did her. She is unmarried at the moment, though she has a boyfriend whom she sees on a regular basis. Should her relationship with this guy grow warmer, they are likely to get married. This boyfriend of hers is also divorced, not once, not twice, not thrice, but five times. There's every reason he likes changing women in the same way that Miss Cathy loves putting on new skirts. However, let me stop babbling and go straight to the point. After reading 'The Polygamist,' Miss Cathy considers polygamy to be rather abhorrent and outmoded. She thinks it's a sort of enslavement for the woman, who is simply used as a sex instrument by those who practise polygamy in Africa. To be honest with you, given the number of divorce stories she has told me and those I've read of in the papers, I don't think the Woman in this monogamous society is less a victim of male chauvinism than she is in polygamous Africa.

Let me quote you the most independent, undoctored and verifiable statistics. According to the Family Policy Studies Centre (quoted in *The Independent*, 25/7/88), the rising trend in cases of divorce in this Queendom is most remarkable. Thus, for example, while in 1961 there were 27,000

divorces, in 1986, 25 years later, the figure had risen to 168,000. Quoting figures from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, *The Guardian* (1/11/89) sums up the rising trend for the 30 years since 1957 as follows: 346,903 marriages against 23,785 divorces in 1957; 386,952 marriages and 43,093 divorces in 1967; 356,954 marriages, and 129,053 divorces in 1977; and 351,761 marriages and 151,007 divorces in 1987. These figures show that, while the number of marriages has stayed more or less the same, divorce has continued to rise dramatically. There is no reason to suppose that divorcees don't remarry, or that they abstain from sex.

Still according to *The Independent* (21/9/89), there are 1.1 million single-parent families in Britain, 90 per cent of which are headed by women. In 1988, *Today* (13/6/88) reported that more than 120,000 illegitimate children (they prefer to call them 'bastards') are born in England and Wales each year. Others speak of one in four births taking place outside marriage, and of all births being outside marriage by the year 2000, should current trends continue. It is also reported that two-fifths of all yearly marriages end in divorce, 70 per cent of which are granted to wives, and that two-thirds of all married men and women have affairs. And red-light districts and brothels abound, despite the

Briton's desperate effort to stifle the animal in them and to assume a much higher moral ground in matters of sex than the rest of Europe. Now, what I want you to retain from all these figures is, the potential even in this monogamous Queendom for men and women to have more than one sex partner. Remember "The Permissive Sixties?" If monogamy and polygamy are defined in terms of sex partners, and not simply in terms of what a society has opted for, irrespective of reality, we are bound to uncover that promiscuity, far from being the characteristic of 'primitive' polygamous societies in the Third World or thereabouts, is just as present if not scandalously more so, in the 'Civilised World.'

The human being is the most adaptive animal in the universe. I'm confident that surviving the winter won't be an insurmountable problem, precisely because I'm ready to adapt. Thus, because Her Majesty's Queendom doesn't allow for polygamy, men have decided to make up for their natural love of variety through divorce or the sheer refusal to get married. The high incidence of divorce attests to this. Since the law doesn't allow anybody to marry more than one partner at any given moment, people are quite contented to spread out their love adventures over a longer period of time, through divorce and co-habitation for example.

A man would therefore have a wife, but spend the rest of his time with a concubine, while arranging for a divorce in order to bring the latter in or simply to be free to do as he pleases. Though no comparative statistics exist in this respect, it is just possible that in a man's lifetime, the average monogamist is likely to have had more partners than his polygamous counterpart. Whether in Africa or here in Europe, it is highly probable that monogamous relationships account for a higher degree of promiscuity than polygamous ones. Let sociologists like Jean-Marie Cochon carry out studies in this area, rather than waste valuable time stating the obvious.

By the way, have you read 'The Polygamist,' the short story in question? It is written about an imaginary country in Africa. In it I argue that the real polygamists should be the Ministers, Directors, Chiefs of services and business tycoons. These are the people who should have more than one wife, so as to help reduce unemployment and prostitution. You know well enough that many of those who prostitute are forced into it by hardship; theirs is just a desperate effort to cling to life, despite all. You are also aware of the fact that in many an African country, those in high office have more than their fair share of the scarce cake of the nation. Imagine a country where ministers are provided with free houseboys, free drivers,

free food, free cars, free lodging, free electricity, free gas, free petrol, and what have you. They have, for free, virtually everything that money can buy. While the common worker spends his tokens to acquire food and lodging, what do you imagine the Minister spends his huge salary on? There is nothing for him to buy in the country, so he banks abroad where he and his immediate dependents shop. Wouldn't it be a good idea if these big guns got married to most of the young college girls they corrupt, mislead, and then abandon futureless? That's why I believe that they really ought to consider going polygamic, rather than staying monogamic, and yet committing worse atrocities than polygamy, as a naked fact of life, has ever been responsible for. If they, in principle, stick to monogamy, this is less on principle than for their personal gratification.

It's my genuine hope and wish that the advent of AIDS might make us reconsider our hypocritical attitudes. Rather than hide under the cloak of monogamy to do what even polygamists dare not do, it is my fervent wish that we should be more open about our inherent love for variety, and take the necessary precautions. This aside, I've remarked one curious and amusing phenomenon. I didn't know that while we in Africa are quite certain that AIDS is a predominantly Western issue, the papers and

TV in this country sound as if the whole of Africa would disappear overnight, exterminated by lethal AIDS. I couldn't believe my eyes the other day when I saw the following words on a van: Donate Blood To Save Life. Africans Not Invited. Stay Away If You've Slept With One Of Late.

It is held here that the traditional healer in the African village, who for centuries has been doing his best to help, is indeed spreading this deadly disease with his razor blade and knife. It's held that the incisions he makes are likely to transmit AIDS, since he ignores the rules of basic hygiene. Without picking a quarrel with the media, who appear to be concerned about human life, and to do so in good faith (at least from the sound of it), I wonder why they don't seem to be patient and respectful when dealing with this individual who really ought to be given the Noble Prize for Health, for saving the lives of millions of desperate Africans for centuries! The healer might be poor in means, but he definitely doesn't ignore the fact that his blade has to be cleaned after use. Even if he didn't know this, we who are more sophisticated and better off, often ignore that God takes care of the birds in the sky, and the forlorn of the universe. Were this not the case, wouldn't it be a miracle beyond biblical proportions, that the peasant African has been able to survive for years,

despite the absence of medical care in the Western sense of the word?

Dear Moungo, my experiences have been so many and so varied, that it's virtually impossible to relate each and every one of them to you, let alone in a systematic manner. My memory is so poor that nothing seems to settle down in it for long. I may never remember some of my experiences, but I promise to do my best next time. These days I go about with a notebook in my chest pocket, under my thick jumper. The weather is becoming more and more awful, and unpredictable. Even the TV weathermen and weatherwomen hardly get their forecasts right any longer. Whenever they forecast blue clear skies and sunshine, it's rain and gale force winds that come instead. So I've chosen the safe way out of it all, to take my umbrella with me wherever I go. Also I must wrap myself up in these thick woollen jumpers and coats. Woollen coats are relevant here, not in Africa, where the sun never stops blazing. Promise me that you would sell your suit and buy yourself a dozen cheap cotton shirts instead, if I tell you the most sensational thing I've learnt so far about this society. Remember that a promise is a debt! And don't think you can break your promise and get away with it, because I can always learn the truth from Monique or Jackie.

They would tell me whether or not you've sold your suit – the so-called sign of civilization!

I'm slightly hesitant to tell you this, because there is every likelihood that you won't believe me. I don't care what you believe, but know that what I'm about to tell you is as factual as you reading this letter at this material moment. Would you ever have expected that these people, who have always denounced superstition in Africa, are themselves superstitious? From the way Lévy-Bruhl and others wrote about *Les Mentalités Primitives*, would you expect that scores of years thence, the white man would be returning to the very practices he criticized with revamped vehemence?

Here, people not only believe in astrologers and palmists, but are served their horoscopes by TV and the popular papers first thing every morning, even before they've had their prided cup of tea. Para-psychologists parade the silver screen and fill newspaper pages with invitations to join exotic clubs that bring the supernatural to your very doorstep. Also, they are strongly convinced that passing under a ladder can bring one ill-luck. The stock market is rumoured to have crashed two years ago (instilling such panic that some individuals took their own lives), for no other reason but the fact that a most influential financier had mistakenly passed under a ladder after a glass

too many at a business dinner. My landlady unknowingly passed under a ladder two days ago, and has been lamenting ever since. She is so positive that something grievous is going to befall her, that she invited her solicitor to write her will, just in case. She told me of a friend of hers further north in the country, who had a ghastly accident a few hours after she had passed under a ladder. Although for her friend, my landlady pointed out, matters had been made worse by the fact that at the time of the accident she was riding a car with 666 its as registration number – figures believed to be ominous and satanic.

Apparently, people must not clean their windows on Sundays, do their washing on New Year's day, or operate an umbrella with their backs to the door, if they are not to stretch their luck. No one must place a pair of shoes on the table, else disaster might strike. Seeing a black face first thing in the morning is about the worst misfortune that could befall a well-bred middle-class conservative woman. More people consult crystal ball readers, gypsies, palmists, numerologists and astrologers than they do doctors, bankers, lawyers and MPs. Such adverts as: "Let the power of the Crystal Oracle reveal the secrets of your future – now," are present in every tabloid to cater for the anxieties and superstitions of their civilised readership.

Politicians and celebrities are said to have good-luck and bad-luck faces for the cameras and to loathe surprises by photographers; they prefer to choose with meticulousness when and how the contours of their faces are to be captured and disseminated. It isn't for non-superstitious reasons that even the minimally literate politicians and celebrities prefer TV interviews next to shelves of voluminous hardbacks.

The English have set aside a particular day as one during which misfortune is most likely. Thus on any Friday the 13th of any month (such as Friday 13th February 1987, or Friday 13th October 1989), the people here are extra careful because anything can happen. Friday the 13th is an ominous day, and the English have always believed this, even when they denounce witchcraft and sorcery in Africa. Perhaps man, no matter how sophisticated he may claim to be, remains essentially superstitious. I wonder why the English, who were wise enough to realise that life is larger than logic, have failed to pursue this wisdom to its logical end.

Dear Mounjo, I must end here. I'm starving and must make my way to the kitchen to think of what I should have for supper. Not that there is much to choose from, but there isn't much one can do in a strange land with strange ways. Food, what food is there in this

place? What a curse that a Queendom this blessed, this beautiful, this prominent, this endowed, should lack the most basic gift of all – good natural food! I’ve searched everywhere since my arrival for fresh vegetables, fresh enough for me to eat without bothering first to clean them, like you and I would back home, but have found nothing, nothing at all. All food here comes in little tins and packets; packaged and tinned not for reasons of health, but to facilitate the business of making money. So you buy a loaf of bread and a can of beans, and are strongly advised to eat them within two days of purchase. Failure to heed such vital advice can lead to food poisoning and death. It’s as if you were sold a poison and then told the only way you can escape its most dreadful effects is premature administration! The emphasis is on instant consumption, for it is only in showing food as a delicate and poisonous commodity that the metabolic capitalists of Her Majesty’s Queendom can succeed in making as much money as they want from the hopelessly gullible public.

It’s here my dear Mounjo, it’s here the African has a definite advantage. Never mind those Europhiles that would stop at nothing to import these poisons from the West! When one is cursed by the evil forces of acculturation, there’s little redemption to hope for even from the Lord Almighty.

I'm still to come to terms with this idea of instant consumption. Perhaps I never will, for I really hate to be pushed to eat something at a pace faster than natural. Imagine how disappointed I was last night when my vigilant landlady, discovering the meat I bought at Sainsbury's was three days older than its Eat-by-date, took it out of the refrigerator and disposed of it in the garbage bag without prior consultation. Indeed, she thought she was doing me a favour! God damn it! I didn't come all the way from the Dark Continent to be dictated to, told what to eat and when. This must stop. If they have nothing but poisons as food, I at least want the freedom to decide when and how to administer these costly poisons!

Yes, Moungo. What a curse for a Queendom this endowed and prominent, not to have a national dish of any kind. On my arrival in Manchester, my landlady said she would treat me to something typically English. So after a nice cup of English Tea, she walked me down the street to a Fish'n'Chips shop that was busy as an anthill. The coming and going could only be compared with the London Underground. We walked in and religiously took our places in the queue, and when it came to our turn to be served, my landlady shouted: "A good portion of Fish'n'Chips for this gentleman from the Cameroons, please. I'll

have a kidney pie m'self." Served, we left; I thinking that perhaps my landlady was still to take me to the place where I could have one of those exotic dishes eaten by the been-tos only back home in Cameroon. But she never did. Perhaps she forgot, perhaps there was nothing else to show, but I'm still to find out.

That's that on food. I won't start telling you how the English love the sight of washing-up liquid so much that it is almost illegal for anyone to wash-up thoroughly. No, I can only promise to tell you more of the bizarre kitchen habits of the English another time; for to do that here would mean another paragraph or two, which my grumbling stomach won't allow. After eating, or rather, after poisoning myself, I intend to make a phone call to Thomson and Thomson, whom, you know, are about my only friends in this Queendom. Hope to hear from you soon. Extend my warmest greetings to Monique and Jackie, and ask them to write me whenever they can.

Oh, I almost forgot! Silly me. Next weekend there is a get-together disco for the overseas students. I really look forward to it, especially as I hear the English students are to attend. I'm dying to find out for myself if it's true, what I hear, that this is a nation without an ear for rhythm. The English, so rumour holds, make the most awkward moves on the

dance floor. So awkward are their moves, I'm told, that even the most modest messenger of God – Angel Gabriel – would not suppress a chuckle as these people try in vain to move their trendy legs or wriggle their shapely hips! I'll tell you more. Cheerio.

Best wishes.

**Yours sincerely,
Charles.**

PART THREE

House QK,
196 Cromwell Road,
Manchester M17 3CYX,
ENGLAND.

Dear Mouno,
Thank you very much for the letter. Due to circumstances beyond my control, I've been unable to reply until now. Things are pretty nasty with me, and I don't really know where to start telling you. It's clear that I'm not going to stay in this Queendom any longer, not because I don't want to, but because I can't. The Department of Philosophy at the Cromwell College has been closed down because of lack of funds. The university has gone bankrupt, so they claim, and because the practice here is for everyone to fend for himself, no one has lifted a finger to bail this renowned institution out of its financial Waterloo. As one African leader put it in the seventies, "When there is a change of government, some heads must roll." The university has decided to sacrifice philosophy in its moment of crisis. The Department of Philosophy is the first casualty; it must be closed down immediately, while some other departments will follow suit if the situation fails to improve.

Strange how people think of nothing to sacrifice first, but philosophy! Even here,

where Hobbes, Locke, Russell and others are said to have worked hard to institute the ideas of Aristotle, Plato and Socrates! Last week I read (*The Independent Magazine* 18/11/89) of a celebrated Czech dissident philosopher who fled his country to Oxford and "was welcomed as a hero and intellectual star," but who now "is reduced to giving his philosophy lectures in a Swindon saloon bar!" Why philosophy? Why not engineering, economics, business administration or something else? Just why philosophy?

Yet poor Professor Redhead seems to have anticipated it all. What a ruse! The only time he's behaved philosophically since I've known him was when he was told the supposedly sad news. On hearing that the department was to be closed down, he smiled and said: "What becomes of me and my African student?" Apparently, I would have been the Department's only student for this academic year had the university not mis-speculated at the stock market on Black Monday. Until its closure, Professor Redhead ran this Department single-handedly, without any junior staff or assistant, but for Cathy his obliging secretary. I knew none of this prior to my coming. Do you think I would have flown all the way to this Queendom, had I realised from the beginning that here philosophy is

after all so peripheral a discipline? Never! How can one pay money to read philosophy in a country where philosophers are rewarded with a pint of lager?

Professor Redhead is like someone who belongs to the past. No wonder he writes the way he does, nothing spectacular; like anyone to whom philosophy is just a pastime, a hobby of some kind, which should only be taken up when the kids have retired to bed and Madam has run short of stories about her day's activities. As a reply to his question, Professor Redhead was told that the university administration had reached the unanimous decision that I should be parcelled and sent to another college to read philosophy, discipline of the dead and dying. As for the professor, he was asked to go and study for a diploma in computing and marketing, if he wished to remain a university employee. If he didn't think he was being treated fairly (*à l'anglaise*), he was free to seek his fortune elsewhere.

Without at all threatening to migrate to the USA, become a Soviet mole, or retire to a pub for pint-a-lecture philosophy, Professor Redhead readily consented, and has since gone off to London to start school afresh! It's miraculous how some people never tire of learning; at his age and level, how does Professor Redhead expect to assimilate what to me sounds like a completely new area of

study? Yet, as he joked to me, henceforth when he graduates from the London Centre for Computing and Market Studies, instead of selling ideas as he has done in the past, he would produce microchips and sophisticated commercials, intended to bring about what he termed "The Information Society." God in heaven knows what he meant, for I was too angered to be bothered.

Do you imagine I accepted to be tossed about in similar fashion? No, not a philosopher of my calibre! I've told them that I'm going back to the Dark Continent, to the University of Kinshasa, to read African Philosophy. It was in Zaire as you would recall, that the Belgian Priest, Tempels, started investigating into whether or not the Dark Continent had some system of thought, "no matter how rudimentary and primitive" that he could use to silence doubting Thomases like Hegel of Germany and Lévy-Bruhl of France. Europe can afford to undermine Western Philosophy, but African Philosophy is still under documentation, and can't be treated yet as a discipline at its menopause. I was wrong to have come here in the first place. Europe isn't where one comes to read African Philosophy, for that matter! Perhaps it was the diamonds that deceived me! Diamonds are tricky! They can make fools even of philosophers like Redhead and me. Just why did I come here in

the first place? Why? Why? I feel like eating my own head! I'm angry with myself, with everything, very angry. I just can't understand why I shouldn't be in a position to behave differently from those I criticize. Yes, those I've criticized all along, just how different am I from them?

I'm ashamed of myself, Mounjo. Terribly ashamed! I've often told you how I detest the fact that Africans come all the way to Europe to study what they should study in Africa. I've shown you that I hate the practice of sending children to attend primary school and college here just to reinforce one's superiority over other Africans who cannot afford the same privileges. Before leaving Cameroon I gave you a lecture on how being educated in Europe is like paying money to be trained into a mercenary or a crusader for European cultures and values in Africa, and how the only genuine way of ever freeing ourselves from such undesired influences is by being educated in Africa. I've also told you that this is easier said than done. As the late venerable Professor Dr Bernard Fonlon once said at conference, "there are many ways of going to Europe; one can go to Europe physically or one can do so psychologically. Either way, one still succeeds in imbibing European influences." So it isn't enough to advocate the establishment of African schools

that are staffed by Africans; for as you have read from my first letter, there are some Africans who are even more European than the Europeans themselves, and it isn't entirely out of the question that there may be some Europeans who are likely to champion Africa's cause more than many Africans. The question therefore isn't simply the transplantation of Eton, Oxford, Cambridge, Sorbonne and Harvard in Africa, but the careful and systematic rethinking of our concerns and priorities.

Examples abound of African countries where a foreign visitor in the heart of the "African jungles" suddenly finds himself surrounded by a group of Latin speaking lads and lasses, who are ready to challenge the visitor's "Westernness" with classical knowledge of Aristotle, Caesar, Plato and what have you. (Just as I'm doing at the moment!) These mini-Etons (Sorbonnes, Oxfords, Cambridges, Harvards) in the bush are set up by Europhiles who spend a sizeable portion of the national cake on tutors imported from the West and paid European rates (which as you know, are a thousand times higher than African rates), to instruct the children of the well-off on how to excel in the irrelevant. In the long run, neither the children of the peasant, who are not given the same chance to prove themselves in this type of mediocrity, nor the

children of the well-off are in a position to contribute towards solving Africa's problems. The latter having spent all their time learning to do what they don't need, and the former, having been relegated to learn about dying traditions which no one needs, and which at best, are thought of only as a means of 'base' entertainment by the urban-centred elite.

In a BBC documentary broadcast 9.30pm, Tuesday 8th September 1987 (which my landlady, for one curious reason or another, had recorded), Malawi was singled out as an example of a country, which has established a school that resembles Eton of England. The school is named Kamuzu Academy and is situated in the Kamugu District in the Central Region of Malawi. This school, nicknamed by some critics as "Eton of the Bush," was built in 1981, and imports all its education equipment from the UK and South Africa. Malawi, as you recall, is the only African country, which has boycotted the idea of severed diplomatic links with South Africa. When this school runs out of chemicals or other equipment, those concerned have to drive for at least 500 miles to acquire new ones. The school cost not less than £15m to build, and needs not less than £1m a year to run.

The students, whose table manners would put many a Briton to shame, are made to believe that no one is truly educated unless

they know something about the ancient world, which shouldn't be mistaken to mean the ancestral world of the African, but the world of Julius Caesar, Aristotle, Plato, Socrates and so on.

All teachers in this school are white, are recruited from Britain, and, of course, are paid British rates. These teachers have three-year contracts and live in European-style bungalows. English is the main language of instruction. Not only is Chichewa, the national language, not taught, but students are forbidden speaking it in the academy. It sounds as though English was seen as the language of civilisation and enlightenment, and Chichewa the language of savagery, barbarism and darkness. Unlike Somalia and Tanzania, many an African country has a long way to go towards understanding that literacy doesn't necessarily mean knowing how to read and write a Western language. Were that the case, it still wouldn't be worth the trouble for 70 per cent of Africans who can hardly be said to share the same cultural, social and intellectual world with the West.

A nos moutons, at the Kamuzu Academy where the Etonians of the bush are trained, the library that houses all the classics one can possibly think of, was deliberately designed to resemble the Library of Congress in the US.

And what do you expect to follow from such excessive drive for Westernisation by the elite few? There is Western influence everywhere; an influence which is so successful that in a debate about whether or not Western influence corrupts, 67 students “felt” that it didn’t, while only 55 students “felt” it did. Perhaps by the time they have imbibed an awful lot of Latin, Classical Music, Western History, Literature and Etiquette, not as many as one of them would “feel” any longer that Western influence corrupts! As the presenter of the BBC documentary observed, the students know more about Europe than they do of their own country, so much so that once in a while, the teachers have to carry out field trips with the students “partly to bring their own country home to them.” Parents, he went on, sacrifice too much for their children to acquire values and an education which are alien to their culture.

This, of course, isn’t news to you and others who have drunk from the well of ‘Modern Education.’ You would recall with especial vividness how as far back as the Primary School, you were taught to sing “London’s Burning” and asked to read readers written to suit the needs of English pupils. The francophones amongst us paid religious attention to Tintin and his worldwide adventures; Tintin, who in terms of spreading

the French culture was De Gaulle's only threat and rival: "Je n'ai qu'un seul concurrent: Tintin," De Gaulle once confessed. At the end of your primary years you were treated to a school leaving examination set in Cambridge or Paris, by examiners who knew absolutely nothing about Cameroon. Yet, because of your abilities to mimic like a parrot, you managed to scrape through. At secondary school you were told that history, geography and literature are exclusively Western. For which reason you learnt to recite the rise and fall of the English Pitts, Walpoles, Disraelis, Gladstones, Palmerstones, Chamberlains and Pretenders. You burnt the midnight candle cramming all there was to cram about the extraordinary feats of many a great European leader, to the point that you could say everything that had ever been written about Frederick the Great of Prussia, Catherine the Great of Russia, Joseph II and Maria Theresa, and Metternich of Austria, Louis the Sun King and Napoleon the warring soldier of France, Bismarck the Iron Chancellor of Germany, Churchill the witty Premier of war-time Britain and all the others. On geography, you knew more about shipbuilding (Tyne, Tees, Clyde) and the agrarian and industrial revolutions in England, more about the Rhine-Ruhr industrial complex in Germany, and more of French vineyards than about your own village. And need I say a

word about literature, which has always meant learning everything ever written in the West?

Had I not come to England to see for myself some of the places we only used to hear and read of, I would never have known how much easier it is to acquire knowledge when that knowledge is based on the past experiences or day-to-day realities of one's own society. When you can only read or hear in abstraction, about places and people you've never seen or met, learning can become such a mystifying and tedious process! If you, I, and other Cameroonians were able to write and pass the GCE (an examination set in London specifically for English students with first-hand knowledge of English history, geography and literature) without a native experience of the West, don't you think super-grades would have been invented to contain us had we the same advantages and facilities as students in the West?

But, my dear Moungo, would you believe that despite these amenities, facilitators and what have you, students in Western societies are as ignorant of the world as anything? It is almost as if knowledge of other peoples and ways were anathema to Westerners. Since you might be tempted to take my own personal accounts with a pinch of salt, let me quote an authoritative source. A survey, conducted by Gallup for the National

Geographic Society, revealed that many a Westerner's knowledge of their society and the world is no better than that of an alien from Mars. How strikingly similar to Africans, wouldn't you say – knowingly all about the dustbins of other societies, and so little about themselves? In what concerns Americans in particular, *The Economist* (July 30, 1988) reported that: "One in five of those polled could not name a single country in Europe. Three in four could not find the Persian Gulf on the map. One in four could not find the Pacific Ocean. One in two could not find South Africa. More astonishing, nearly one in two could not find New York state on the map. Indeed, 14 per cent could not even find the United States."

Doesn't this strike you as odd? That the pace-setters of the world should appear to know so little about their universe of dominance? So little about themselves, powerful and amply facilitated though they are? Wonders will never end; surprises would never cease springing from across the Atlantic!

Yet, "you ain't heard nothing yet," as they would say at 10 Downing Street. Back to the BBC documentary on the Kamuzu Academy. This training is not just to compensate for the real Europe where these students haven't been yet. It is seen as preparing them for the UK, where they

ultimately have to go to make use of the skills they have acquired. Thus, if they are being taught all about Sunday barbecues, swimming pools, table etiquette, the classics, suits, ties and straw hats (or how to be the complete gentleman or lady à l'anglaise), this is to purge them of that "Tarzanic jungleness" that is typical of Africans from the bush like myself, who come here for the first time and behave like sheep at Hyde Park. (It isn't for the sake of kindness that every foreign student on British Council scholarship on arrival in England is sent to stay with *a typical English family*! This, of course, is to smooth the way to his/her cultural acclimatization!) The training is to make it impossible for Thomson and Thomson, not only to tell the difference between an English and an African black, but also to distinguish between the perfect English and the Mini-English from the Eton of the Bush.

Do you imagine the African child who has gone through all these stages of Westernisation or "Blanchification" would return home and bear the misery and poverty without complaint? Would you blame the child if the next thing they did were to steal, steal in order to sustain the expensive life style he has been socialised to accept as 'normal'? Do you now understand why most so-called "educated" Africans like myself are so enthusiastic about political power and city life?

Would you still say you do not know why Africa is economically the most powerless continent in the world? Isn't everything as clear as water from the spring? That such acculturation has derailed our continent and compounded Africa's complex web of chronic problems to such an extent that even Lucifer the tempter would not deceive us to fall down and worship him, and all would be well?

The BBC concluded its documentary by saying that, while Eton of England grew naturally out of this society in order to answer to the needs of its people, the Eton of Malawi is a transplant that can hardly be said to respond to the needs of the country. That certainly is the case, for millions of pounds are spent to "prepare" young Africans for Europe where they almost always go for further studies, but not a single penny is spent to prepare them for Africa, where they are expected to spend their post-academic lives. *L'Afrique est le continent de la facilité*; there it suffices to shout, "Open Sesame," and miracles begin to occur! I pity us Mouno, I really pity us!

While this BBC documentary might have been about Malawi, it by no means confines the mad craving for Westernisation and Western-style institutions to Malawi. It is a problem of which the whole of Africa is guilty. Malawi might not even be the guiltiest of them all. Perhaps we really ought to praise Malawi

for making no secret of her own Europhilia. Others pretend to be “authentic” Africans, just to avoid criticism; yet you risk a rope round your neck, should you hesitate to agree with them that their great grand-parents must have been white somehow. Remember the famous theory once developed by our professor of Social Thought, that black is a superior skin colour because all babies are born white, but that only the black baby undergoes a metamorphosis in its skin colour? Yes, there are Africans like this, who sing the song they know the public wants to hear, but practise the exact opposite in private. Such Africans are no different from the health minister who preaches against smoking and bleaching of the skin, but who either dies of lung cancer or of improper post-operation stitches due to damaged skin cells.

Unless we rapidly become aware of and do something about the fact that not every African is an African, and that people don’t always mean what they say, nor say what they mean, our problems are far from solved. I’m not blaming those who are educated abroad, because not everyone is in a position to choose what is good for them, and often people don’t always know what is good for them, either. The power of socialisation is so great that many people are often unaware that what they are practising is not really what they ought to

be practising. The way to start changing is by questioning what one is told, taught or expected to practise. Unless we start asking why things are done this way, and not otherwise, and why some people always want to have things their way, we are doomed to wail in the wilderness for a long, long time yet to come.

Even though many a genuine scholar in Africa has made the same point again and again, I find it sufficiently important to merit reiteration. Inasmuch as we recognise colonialism as one of the causes of Africa's present impasse, it would be wrong to sound as if colonialism is all that there is to it. This type of myopia is too dangerous to harbour, because it fails to give sufficient account of the post-colonial malaise brought about by "*les drames internes*." With a little bit of thought, one immediately sees that, just as historical events always have their remote causes as well as the immediate antecedents that spark them off, we must think of Africa's present dilemmas as the outcome of a process, not the result of a single point in time. In this way, we would avoid the mistakes of the fatalists, yet complete the thinking process of the dependentists. The causes of Africa's problems are neither simply external, nor exclusively internal, but a combination of both.

If you retained the image of the cow I gave in my first letter, then Africa is best seen as milked by external forces with the active collaboration of internal counterparts. Just like in sorcery, where one cannot become a victim unless one is offered by one's very own relative to be "eaten," so too can Africans not be exploited by so-called multinationals and Western governments, if they weren't, in the first place, sacrificed as victims by their very own "brothers and sisters." As I said earlier, the majority of Africans are like miserable creatures with ticks clinging on and biting into their flesh, with the active collaboration of other parasites, which are in their blood systems, for the purpose of stirring their blood warm for sucking. If external forces were entirely to blame, as some would want us to believe, where do we classify the leaders (in the broadest sense of the word), who not only bank abroad in Europe, but who sometimes are mad enough to show off "their" riches by helping to construct free hostels for European school children, while the children in their own miserable and highly-plundered countries are languishing in the ignorance and poverty of the overburdened villages and the ghettos? Or those who reproduce Basilicas in their native villages with so-called personal fortunes, while their toiling peasants hunger and thirst to death in darkness?

As I think I've said before, an awful lot of energy or fuel has been burnt thinking about Africa and its problems. Not all of what has been written thus far is conservative enough to be thrown into the waste paper basket. With a bit of patience and weeding, we can boast of a handful of scholars genuine enough to be given a congratulatory handshake. Among these are certain literary giants who have at one time or other risked their lives in order to tell the truth. They have been ready to die that the majority of their compatriots may be saved. And the world hasn't remained entirely untouched, for even the desolate bird in its solitude somewhere in the heart of the Sahara or the Kalahari continues to sing in hope and prayer, that a traveller might discover and free it from the hungry fangs of death. The 1986 Nobel Prize awarded to Wole Soyinka of Nigeria is a sign of hope to the African intellectual, a sign that the world isn't always as hardhearted and conservative as it's often impressed upon the struggling and the overburdened.

Many more scholars have written, and are writing, and though I've talked of a handful only, I can't afford to name names without running out of paper. By the way, all genuine intellectuals know themselves, and don't have to be named by me to qualify. Genuine intellectuality should be a matter of

conviction, some powerful force that drives one along to do what one believes is right, not for oneself, but for others, without whom one would find the world an impossible place to live in. "Others," who, incidentally, can't always be determined rightly, if we fail to pursue the issues that matter, or if we decide to chase after red herrings. May the Almighty God bless and replenish the efforts of the Genuine African Intellectual. (Remember that the criterion by which one qualifies as a Genuine Intellectual isn't Western Education, but selflessness in service to the general public. Without being sufficiently altruistic, a professor or Doctor in the Western sense of these words is of no relevance to Africa today. My advice to such pseudo-intellectuals, who are present in their numbers, is that they should migrate to the West where they may be relevant.)

And as concerns migration to the West, this Queendom and the US in particular have been treated to the feast of their lives by the governments of our Sleeping Continent. Imagine the thousands of Africans amongst the 65,000 and more overseas students currently studying in this Queendom, and imagine the thousands studying in the US, France, Germany, Italy and other Western seats of wisdom. Most of them are sponsored by their home governments, or by parents who have

nicked from the faceless masses at one time or another. These studies cost millions, and there is no gainsaying that many a university in the West would fold were it not for the huge sums of money that daily come their way from the developing countries. I wonder whether the poor shall ever stop paying the rich for one thing or another!

The Cameroonian government sends not less than 200 students abroad each year for training in computer sciences and artificial intelligence, engineering and technology, nuclear physics and so on. Our country is deeply in the red because of this! But what happens when these students graduate? There are no jobs for them in Cameroon, because the government lacks the necessary infrastructure to absorb them and make use of their expertise. The only option available is to have them integrated into the notorious mediocrity of the civil service, where they would be paid for doing nothing relevant, or simply for rendering a very uncivil service to the Cameroonian public.

Those graduates, who can't stand this sort of hand to mouth existence under the overpowering spell of the central authorities, have no alternative but to seek employment abroad in the US, Britain, France and elsewhere in the West. Thus the very West that charged Cameroon exorbitant rates to train

Cameroonian students now benefits from the expertise of these young Cameroonian intellectuals free of charge. Once employed to work for this or that Western firm, all their contributions to the sciences, all their inventions in modern technology, are copyrighted by the firms in question, and the glory that would have been Cameroonian and African, is now Western. Many an important invention in the West has been the work of Africans forced abroad in this fashion. It hasn't occurred to the Cameroonian, nor any other African government, to demand a fee from Western countries employing their intelligentsia, just as it never occurred to them to think twice before financing the training of these students in areas (artificial intelligence, nuclear physics...) that could never ever be useful to their countries or peoples. (This brings to mind the story of a young Nigerian whose village rejected him for returning from Europe as a doctor of animals, to a community where people were dying en masse for lack of simple medical care.)

Yet, as you should know by now, the West never releases even the most mediocre of its experts into Africa or the Third World for that matter, without demanding cutthroat fees from the countries in need. If our governments can afford to pay so much to have their students trained in the West in areas most

irrelevant to their immediate needs and problems, they should also be able to obtain the best deal possible from any Western state desirous of harnessing the talents of these unemployed experts. Otherwise, there is no way Western education or training would ever facilitate the movement of our countries away from the havens of poverty and merciless exploitation.

To tell you the truth Mounjo, I'm really exasperated by what has happened to me. I would have loved to stay on and become used to the English, their culture and their curious P Civilisation. But I must go, if only because I was wrong to have come in the first place. Yes, I still don't see why I came here, where African Philosophy isn't even recognised, let alone taught. Perhaps my primitive capitalist instincts pushed me to come over here under the false pretext of studying philosophy. If this really is the case, then I can at least be congratulated for dragging myself out of a potential mess. You know how I hate to be ruled by instincts, though I've heard some scholars argue with insistent emotiveness, devoid of all logic, that: "*L'émotion est noire, la raison est blanche*" or something of the sort. Whoever has belched such filth I have disagreed with wholeheartedly, if only for the simple reason that were this true, the emotion of Fear alone wouldn't give our kleptocrats the

room to breathe freely while the masses bleed. Let the proponents of this piece of filth, not be too ashamed to review their thesis (original sin, I prefer). Scholars are constantly shifting ground, aren't they? Like a house founded on sandy soil.

I can't say that my coming to Britain has been entirely without fruit, even if this fruit has been forcibly and prematurely harvested. It is for this reason that I insist you must not share my letters with anyone. I don't want to be known as the philosopher who was too impatient to allow his meal to cook properly. Maybe my impressions of this country and its people would have matured and altered, had I the time to put them to the test. Borrowing from Lévi-Strauss, the French anthropologist, I would rather you take these impressions as "cru" instead of "cuit." In any case, you must admit first impressions are better than no impressions at all.

Incidentally, since I've mentioned anthropology, I may well carry on with it. Yes, I can say that my stay in this country, albeit brief, hasn't been entirely devoid of academic excitement. I wouldn't have discovered *The Innocent Anthropologist*, had I not come here. This is a book, which, though supposedly published in 1983 about the Dowayo people of northern Cameroon, a boring bookworm like myself was unable to spot in the local libraries

and bookshops for six years. I bought it in one of the big bookshops at the Manchester city centre. The first thing that caught my attention was the title. How can an anthropologist be innocent and still an anthropologist? I asked myself, as I fingered the copy the shopkeeper handed me.

Suddenly, it dawned on me that Nigel Barley, the author who is known on popular TV as “The People’s Anthropologist”, might have intended the title as an irony. What gave me this impression is the photograph of two naked Dowayos (with only a tiny bunch of leaves to shade their nakedness from Barley’s probing lens) on the front cover, inspecting a photograph of Her Majesty the Queen of England. It is this photograph that made me not take Nigel Barley literally. To me, it is the two Dowayos who are innocent and quite unaware of the fact that the photograph, which an apparently friendly “anthropologist” has asked to take of them, is going to serve as the cover picture of a book in a strange, distant country, where they might never go. One may ask, were these Dowayos as informed about the world as their anthropologist friend, would they have allowed their photograph taken, knowing that people aren’t always as friendly as their gay faces may indicate, and that they could serve as laughing stock in the land of the civilized?

In fact, ever since I bought the book, no one has failed to laugh cynically each time they look at the cover page. The fundamental question is an ethical one. Don't certain anthropologists take undue advantage of the people they study, just because these happen to be "primitives" in the jungles or mountains of the Dark Continent? Is it because one is *seen to be* unsophisticated and uninformed, that one should be exploited? In other words, is it because one hasn't seen a camera before, and therefore tends to think that it is magical and sensational, that one should pay the expensive price of appearing naked on the cover of a book one might not even be aware is published? Just why do some of us, researchers, continue to treat others as if they were not human beings like ourselves? Have the runners-up in life got but water in their veins? Do the 'remote' and the 'primitive' really have no human dignity as such? Would that very anthropologist expect to be photographed and exposed in the same manner, in the name of friendship, culture and academic degrees?

This said, permit me to pretend to be academically "objective" once more. To appreciate the work of an objective scholar, one needs to put on the same thinking cap, doesn't one? Thus I'll say that I agree with much of what Nigel Barley has written on

Cameroon in general and Dowayo in particular, though I have a quarrel with his style. His study is academic, but his thinking and pen are both tainted by his culture and intellectual tradition. I wonder why some of us pretend that we can free ourselves of the narrow parochial binoculars of our cultures, traditions and societies. If this were such an easy thing to do, why are African leaders yet unable to free themselves of their Europhilia, despite all the criticisms? Perhaps the only reason why some scholars have for long remained blinded is the fact that they've been blessed to undertake scholarship in countries that are noted for their aggressive possessiveness, their excessive craving for world power, and their ever-glowing ambition to pose as standard-setters for others.

Without offering to chew and digest for you, I'll cite indiscriminately from this book, just to give you the gist of the sort of things you must be prepared to read when the copy I posted you yesterday eventually arrives. To be honest with myself, I have to admit that Nigel Barley has a biting sense of humour. He has a jolly gay pen, which I fancy. He could more easily pass for a satirist than an academic, except, as seems likely, he intended this book to sell as novel. The fact that there are many things about Cameroon which he entirely misunderstands, either points to another, that

even two years aren't long enough time to pretend to understand a people – be they as 'simple' as the Dowayos – or confirms my point that when we say we are studying such and such a people, what we actually end up doing, is writing about ourselves and our prejudices. Thus, an anthropologist ends up publishing his ignorance of the "primitive native," or his knowledge of himself and his society. Were the primitive native ever to read some of the things anthropologists write to gain academic titles and socio-political fame in their closed societies, he would explode in a big cynical laugh. But unfortunately, the rules of the game are such that he isn't always in a position to verify what is written about him, and so will never save scholars the trouble of deceiving themselves and the whole wide world.

I wonder how many anthropologists have drawn the necessary lessons from the story of the Tasadays? This supposedly forgotten tribe, yet indeed planted in the heart of the jungle in the Philippines by a local man of influence, was for years to turn the anthropological world inside out. They would give every anthropologist the answers he wanted to hear, and not the truth as it were. And for long, anthropologists made doctorates and titles with lies dished out by people "so

simple, so native!" Just how many of them have learnt from this?

1. No White man, at this time, had ever been known to touch beer. Seizing a calabash, they proceeded to wash it out in deference to my exotic sensibilities. This they did by offering it to a dog to lick out. Dowayo dogs are not beautiful at the best of times; this one was particularly loathsome, emaciated, open wounds on its ears where flies feasted, huge distended ticks hanging from its belly. It licked the calabash with relish. It was refilled and passed to me. Everyone regarded me, beaming expectantly. There was nothing to be done; I drained it and gasped out my enjoyment. Several more calabashes followed. They were astonished that I was not drunk. It is virtually impossible for a Westerner to get drunk on millet; he simply cannot hold the required amount. Dowayos, however, rapidly become falling-down drunk on factory-made beer. It is not uncommon for them to make a bottle last three days, during which time they claim to be constantly inebriated (Barley, 1983: 64-5).

Barley not only treats Westerners as homogeneous, but as similar in tastes and capabilities. He knows Westerners well

enough to plead their cause. But with no evidence other than my ability to realise that I'm telling the truth, I can remember the case of certain Dutch "Westerners" who came to Ndu in North-West Cameroon to do research, but who declined to drink anything other than the local corn-beer, Shaa. These "Westerners" (a woman and a man) would drink litres of Shaa until they were falling-down drunk. Granted that what I say is true, do we presume that the Dutch don't belong to Barley's group of Westerners? Or do these two simply make up the exception that proves the rule?

2. I, of course, would never believe anything so against the grain of my own culture without much better evidence than this. I - like they - see what I expect to see. The anthropologist in the field is seldom troubled by the 'false' beliefs of those about him; he simply puts them in brackets, sees how they all fit together and learns to live with them on a day-to-day basis (Barley, 1983: 161).

I would have thought that such "'false' beliefs" sound the alarm of the possibility of a conflict between mainstream or conventional interpretations, and radical, critical alternatives. And when the anthropologist says he has "made sense" out of what he has

observed or been told, just how critical is he of the implications of this? Could meaning be anything other than confirming one's latent assumptions and stereotypes? Again, I urge you to find out for yourself, because I have no time to write down everything. Remember that I have to pack and get out of here fast.

3. Every tribe had someone to despise. For the Dowayos, the Koma fulfilled this very necessary function. A pagan tribe some thirty odd miles away across the river, the Koma were credited with a debased form of language by the Dowayos; they were savages who lived in incredible squalor, horribly primitive. Their ugliness was a standing joke among the Dowayos (Barley, 1983: 161).

How true Barley is about this! Yes, every tribe has someone to despise. This fits into our idea of relative advantage and superiority, doesn't it? Perhaps all I really ought to add to Barley's statement is that every Race, every nation, every person, and above all, every anthropologist has someone to despise.

4. It appears that gangs of huge African women roam the streets after dark snatching the purses of lone males, beating

up those bold enough to resist. This is quite feasible. Africa is the home of the most astonishing physiques, both male and female, the result of lives of continuous hard physical labour and a diet low in protein. A willowy Westerner feels initially dwarfed by the pectoral developments of Southern Cameroonians" (Barley, 1983: 23).

5. Sexual encounters in Africa are so unromantic and brutish in their nature that they serve rather to increase the alienation of the fieldworker, not to moderate it, and are best avoided (Barley, 1983: 163).

What else can I say but that experience is the best teacher and that anthropology is definitely *the* discipline to be envied by philosophers? Only I would like to know whether it is the fieldworker who introduces brutishness, and who lacks romance, or is it the partner who is simply behaving with the anthropologist in a way that fits in with Barley's assertion that every tribe has someone to despise? I say no more, except to stress that anthropology seems to be just what I need. It sure makes you feel that I must have missed lots of vital observations about physique, eating habits, and the relationship between men, wallets and women in this society,

because of my acute lack of an anthropological background.

If what I hear is true, then the only place left yet for anthropological practice by Africans is right here in the West. The whole of Africa and the Third World have been partitioned by scrambling Western anthropologists. In the area of penetrating the remoteness of the Dark Continent, their only rivals are missionaries and tourists. The main sentiment on meeting of two whites in the bush is one of disappointment and hostility. If one is a missionary and the other not, they are competitors. If neither is a missionary, they are simply degrading each other's exoticist fantasies. I remember two Americans tourists at the 1984 Mankon Nukwi Festival. They were displeased to have "these damned white faces creep into every picture I've taken." Thus ruining the effect of the explorer in 'untouched' tribal land, which they intended to portray to friends and relatives back home in the US. As Peace Corps Volunteers, Americans are told: "Bring the world back home with you." And you don't want to go home with a world that is "déjà vu" do you? So each Westerner, be he anthropologist, volunteer or tourist, likes to think he is the first, the only one in untouched, virgin territory. Another white in the same place forces him to realise that he is in an accessible 'modern' place, not the tribal escape

he seeks as a seasoned anthropologist, volunteer or traveller. He has to be able to claim, in every sense: "The adventurer returns unscathed from the Dark Continent."

As I've already mentioned, I agree with much of what Barley says, and that my major quarrel is with his style and attitude. His tendency to interchange Dowayo, Cameroon, Africa and the Third World is neither unique nor new. Many a Western scholar uses such devastating generalizations under the pretext that they are writing about little known parts of the world. In Barley's words they have to do with "a strangely neglected group of mountain pagans in North Cameroon." Would you dare to question me when I say that such scholars sacrifice academic or "scientific" precision, in order to satisfy parochialism, mediocrity and stereotyping ignorance? If a scholar talks of Africa, when he in fact means Cameroon or Dowayo, what impression does he create in readers unfamiliar with these parts of the world? And just how much damage is such a scholar doing to Africans as a whole? Why this craving to appear bigger than one actually is? If there is relative advantage and superiority even in academic pursuits, as I've already told you there is in the Church, where else can we seek refuge?

Barley has a good sense of humour, and you really ought to read his book as soon as

you receive the copy I've sent. I wish I could write half as well. But alas! My limitations are numerous, and I'm just too conscious of them to dare. The book is punctuated with such wit that I hear is only typical of the English, which most unfortunately, I won't discover because I'm coming back to Africa. Maybe I would have ended up writing my own anthropological impressions of this society, were I to stay a little longer. But I shouldn't be too presumptuous about this; for as Barley himself admits, when he returned to England, he found it difficult to see things as 'natural' or 'normal' any longer: "'Being English' seems as much a pose as 'being Dowayo'" (Barley, 1983: 187). So it is very probable that I would "go native" were I to stay in the English native land for long. Yet the only way one can truly learn about others (not about oneself) is by staying with them for years and years, becoming part and parcel of them!

Somewhere in the book, Barley recounts an experience I happen to share. It is about how he went to see the dentist, a similar experience to one I had. I've chosen to end this brief review with the passage in which he recounts his experience at the dentist's.

6. As soon as the surgery door opened, I found myself propelled by waiting Africans to the front of the queue. Within

was a certain amount of dilapidated dental equipment and a large diploma from the University of Lyons, which reassured me somewhat. I explained the problem to a huge man inside. Without more ado, he seized a pair of pliers and pulled out my two front teeth. The unexpectedness of the attack somewhat dulled my senses to the pain of the extraction. The teeth, he declared, were rotten. Perhaps, he hinted darkly, they had always been rotten. He had removed them. I was cured. I should pay the nurse outside. I sat blankly in the chair, blood gushing down my shirtfront, and tried to make him understand that he could now proceed to the next stage of his treatment. It is not easy to argue in a foreign tongue in the absence of two front teeth; I made little progress. Finally, he understood that I was a difficult patient. Very well, he declared huffily, if I was not content with his treatment, he would bring the dentist himself. He disappeared, leaving me wondering who had just operated upon me. I had fallen into the obvious trap of believing that anyone in a dental surgery, wearing a white coat and prepared to extract teeth, was a dentist.

Another man appeared, also in a white coat. Swiftly, I asked whether he was the dentist. He agreed that he was. This other

man was his mechanic; he also repaired watches (Barley, 1983:109-10).*

I've also stumbled across the memoirs of yet another anthropologist, about his fieldwork experiences in the Grassfield region of Cameroon. Quite uncharacteristically, this one sounds rather modest and insists on talking about the Bamenda area instead of Cameroon, Africa or the Third World. Won't you say that he looks rather like a student? Aren't masters and experts those to shout out and make noise internationally, so as to live up to the Humpty Dumpty image they have created for themselves? This particular anthropologist seems rather like one who hasn't yet read about the importance of the anthropological scramble for Africa. Or, maybe he's simply too intelligent to pass for something that he isn't. He fears to be invited to a conference as an expert Africanist, just to betray his ignorance by making devastating generalisations from a sub-study carried out in "a little remote village in the unknown heart of the African jungle," following demoded Western research techniques.

However, I didn't mention this individual to sing his praises. I mentioned him

* Barley, N 1983, *The Innocent Anthropologist*, Penguin Books: Harmondsworth.

because I'm interested in something he said which to me seems superficial, hastily arrived at, and consequently, difficult to swallow. He writes about his experiences in the village where he carried out his study, and recounts how people deceived him, were openly dishonest with him, told lies indiscriminately, and borrowed and refused to pay back his money. He then proceeds to compare people in that village with people here in Europe whom he believes are different. Europeans are honest with one another, nobody lies indiscriminately, and no one borrows and refuses to pay back money.

Following my brief experience of this Queendom (if it's anything to go by), this contrast appears true. Anyone who takes a quick uncritical look at the way things are done here is likely to agree with Dr Vancroft, the anthropologist in question. But since a philosopher always ought to look in detail, and to cast his critical eye over everything, including even what is often taken for granted, let me tell you that fundamentally, both societies have the same vices.

In the little Grassfield village Dr Vancroft depicts, people are closer to and deal with one another at a more personal level than is the case in this Queendom. Here, individualism and privacy are everyone's obsession, and people deal with one another at

an impersonal level most of the time. At this rate, it isn't surprising that in the village in question, someone is most likely to be dishonest with someone else who knows them in person. People lie to and borrow without paying from those who know them; there is no other way out of it, because it just happens that everybody knows everyone else in the village. But here in England, such a situation is most unlikely. Because people find it hard to have others who love and care for them, they do all they can to suppress their instinct for dishonesty, lies and deception, in order to protect their delicate relationships with one another. They choose to save the human warmth and feeling that is so difficult to come by in their society. Unlike the Grassfield village where one can still turn to others for warmth, love and care if one severs one's good face with another, it is not that easy to do the same thing in England.

But this doesn't mean that the English are necessarily honest and straightforward, while the villagers in north-west Cameroon are dishonest and crooked. For the reasons already stated, someone might choose to maintain a friendship with others, yet attempt to defraud their bank or firm or make money through cheating the general faceless public whom is forced to pay exceedingly high prices for the food, goods and services they need. Again, one

may not tell lies to one's close friends and associates, but isn't one lying, cheating, being dishonest and deceptive, when one persuades others with adverts and commercials to buy items that bring them more problems instead of helping solve old ones? How many people tell the taxman the truth about their incomes and earnings?

Thus the real difference is that here in England people have a few select friends and associates whom they treat with deference, but the rest of society is deceived, lied to, dishonestly treated, as if they were not human beings like the select few. In the Grassfield village of north-west Cameroon, the belief is that, since everyone is known to everyone else, and since in that circumstance one can only be dishonest with someone familiar and close, such vices are much more remarkable. In the one society, dishonesty is reserved for "the faceless nameless others" about whom one couldn't care less, whereas in the other society, everyone has their share of the good, the bad, and the ugly, because everyone is known to everyone else.

This same reasoning could be used to explain a phenomenon I've remarked on here. Couples in this Queendom tend to have affairs with their partners' brothers, cousins or best friends; hardly is it that a husband or wife strikes up a relationship with a total stranger to

their partner. Two days ago I read in the papers how a wife ran away with her brother-in-law after her honeymoon! The other day it was a mother striking it off with her son-in-law. Why do you think people are apparently 'so callous' to their partners, relations and friends? The explanation my dear Mounjo, is a most simple one. Unlike Cameroon where we tend to claim to show warmth to almost everybody, even those we might be meeting for the very first time, the practice here is for people to stick to themselves, to the few they know. In terms of affairs, this can only mean that a man or woman is most likely to start one with someone close, someone they both know. No wonder the saying that only your most trusted friend and companion can stab you in the back, originated from here! To stab someone in the back, you have to be really close.

Mounjo, you were right when you wrote that even philosophers ought to learn to be silent once in a while. I agree, for my problems are many, and the sooner I sort things out the better. My landlady, who happens to be very touched by the fact that I'm going away too soon, has offered to take me to a charitable shop where I can dispose of the winter equipment I bought. Once done, I would have to go down to London and see to my visa and flight to Kinshasa. Thomson and

Thomson rang yesterday to assure me that they are quite ready to help ferry me about the London jungle. I'm beginning to miss this country already, even without having stayed here for long. Strange how the human being falls in love, isn't it? How beautiful the world would be, and what a love for everyone, were we its inhabitants a little less prone to destructive pursuits!

To prepare my trip to Zaire, I visited the university library a couple of days ago. It was not to look for a book on philosophy, but for anything on general knowledge about my host country to be. There wasn't much to be found on this former Belgian colony, but there was this valuable excerpt of a speech delivered in 1920 by Honourable Benquin, Minister of Colonies, to missionaries leaving for the Belgian Congo, the name Zaire was known by then:

The Duties of Missionaries in our Colony

Reverend Fathers, dear compatriots, welcome to our second fatherland - Belgian Congo.

The task you are called to accomplish is very delicate and requires a great deal of tact.

As priests, you certainly have come to evangelize, but such evangelization must be inspired by our great principle - which is to place the interests of our home country above everything else.

The essential purpose of your mission is therefore not to teach the Blacks to know God. They already know him. They praise and submit themselves to Mungu-Zambé or to Ngalkola, and what have you? They know that to kill, to steal, to sleep with another's wife, to slander, to insult another, etc..., is evil.

Let us be courageous enough to admit it; you have not come to teach them what they already know. Your role essentially consists in facilitating the work of our administrators and industrialists. This means that you will be interpreting the Gospel in such a way as to best serve our interests in this part of the world.

To achieve this mission, you shall amongst other things endeavour to:

- 1. Purge our savages of any interest they may have in the rich material resources that abound in their soil and sub-soil, so as to avoid a situation whereby they could, out of such interest, engage in fierce competition with us and one day dream of dislodging us. Your knowledge of the Gospel should enable you to easily find scriptural texts that recommend, uphold and enshrine poverty, such as:*

"Happy are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"It is more difficult for a rich man to enter heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle."

2. *Contain them so that they may never revolt. The administrators and industrialists will from time to time be obliged to resort to violence (insult and beating) to ensure they do not revolt. The negroes must not be allowed to retaliate and to harbour vengeance. You therefore must teach them to endure all. You must preach to them, urging them to follow the example of all the saints who showed the other cheek, forgave those who trespassed against them and suffered to be spat on and reviled without as little as wincing.*
3. *Wean them off, and make them despise all that could give them courage to rise against us. I am thinking here particularly of their numerous war exploits which they claim render them invulnerable, and to which the old men cling desperately since their days are numbered. You must therefore concentrate your efforts essentially on the young.*
4. *Insist especially on blind submission and obedience. This virtue is best practised in the absence of the critical spirit. You must therefore avoid cultivating the critical spirit in your schools.
Teach your pupils to believe and not to reason. Institute for them a system of confession which will make you good detectives quick to denounce any black who attains self-awareness and demands national independence.*
5. *Teach them a doctrine whose precepts you yourselves will not put into practice. And if*

they ask you why you preach one thing and practise another, answer by saying that you, blacks, follow what we say. And if they answer back by pointing out that faith that is not put into practice is dead, be angry and retort: "Happy are those who believe without protesting".

- 6. Tell them their statues are the work of Satan. Confiscate them and fill our museums and the Vatican with them.*
- 7. Never offer a chair to a black who pays you a visit. If anything, give him no more than a cigarette. Never invite him to dinner even if he kills a chicken for you each time you pay him a visit.*
- 8. Consider all blacks as little children whom you must continue to deceive and manipulate even long after independence. Insist that they call you: Father.*
- 9. Cry: "Communism and persecution" when they ask you to stop deceiving and exploiting them.*

These then, dear compatriots, are some of the principles that you shall practice unfailingly. You will find many others in books and texts that will be handed out to you at the end of this meeting.

The King attaches considerable importance to your mission. Besides, he has decided to do everything possible to facilitate it.

You shall enjoy full protection from our administrators. Money shall be granted you for

your evangelization and travels. You shall receive free land to build on and develop. You shall be allowed to recruit a workforce (pupils and catechumens).

Reverend Fathers and dear compatriots, this is what I have been asked to deliver to you today.

Let us work hand in hand to uphold the grandeur of our Fatherland.

Long Live the King! Long Live Belgium!

And that's food for thought for you, my dear friend. That said, there is virtually little else for me to write you about. I'm so confused, tired and disappointed. I think I need a quick rest before my landlady wobbles up the stairs to ask: "Charles, ain't you ready, M'Love? It's time to go." Don't bother yourself with me for a while, though I should write as soon as I'm settled in Zaire. Extend my warmest regards to the family, and tell them of the disappointment. Do let them know that I'm about to take off back to Africa, which I shouldn't have left in the first place. But we don't always do what we ought to do, do we?

Wishing you the very best in life. May the Almighty guide and guard you through the narrow and difficult path of life in Africa.

Yours sincerely,

Charles

PART FOUR

**Livingstone Hospital
For Tropical Diseases
37 Outsider Close
London NW2 5ISX
England**

Dear Moungo,
Last night I dreamt a dream, a ridiculous dream indeed. You were arrested, detained without trial for 12 months, then tried and condemned to life imprisonment. Your judges? The National Military Tribunal. Your crime? Coughing subversively along the unitary corridors of Cameroonian Power, and splattering the minds of law-abiding folks with corrupting graffiti. Your father-in-law was also condemned. His crime? Aiding and abetting sabotage and high treason by smearing the boulevards of the capital with revolutionary shit. But his sentence was much less severe, perhaps because as an old man with one foot in the grave, he might die his natural death before a tenth of the term is served.

Two days after the trial, when things had quietened down a bit, your prosecutors decreed nationwide demonstrations by the faithful, or rather, the fearful. The streets were filled as the folks, said to be disgusted by your threats to republican peace and presidential security, poured out of their shacks and huts

onto the filthy streets with shouts of “down with treason.” “The country doesn’t want distraction,” the leaders echoed with satanic enthusiasm. “Nor will it allow fermenters of dissent to import and spread chronic tuberculosis across our healthy political spectrum. No to divisiveness, yes to unity.” Bla bla bla...

The papers reflected this image of solidarity and forged community of purpose between the leaders and the led, while the radio and TV made an anthem of the declarations of the empowered. Your lawyer, a Frenchman by reputation, did explain to the foreign press (the government press would have nothing to do with a traitor) after trying in vain to secure your release, how you had thought that by spreading revolutionary tracts inciting the public to rise en masse and scream “enough!” Cameroonians would all join your war against “la megalomanie politique en Afrique noire.” Not only did you underestimate the instinctive brutality and repression “d’un régime autocratique”, but also you were equally full of utopian expectations on the responsiveness of a people numbed for decades by intensive tyranny. He had no illusions whatsoever about your naive optimism, and had only agreed to defend you because of a lifelong duty to the politically inhibited and forsaken of the Dark Continent.

The dream was long and torturous. Much of what happened, I can't remember. And God knows I've tried! But there is one surprisingly vivid memory: I was so shocked that I wrote a letter to Monique your wife. In the confusion of the dream, I appeared to have been witness to your arrest and trial, to everything that happened. Yet at the same time, it seemed I was far away from it all, somewhere neither in Her Majesty's Queendom nor in Mobutu's Zaire. But wherever this was, Monique must have known my address, for she sent me the letter to which I replied in the dream. Yes, my letter to her stands out in my mind, clear as if written in blood on white calico.

"Dear Monique," I wrote. "It's with the deepest regret that I read of your husband's arrest and detention without trial. Although you confess you ignore the reason for his further loss of liberty, I can't avoid the haunting feeling of guilt that my letters might have brought about his woes, innocent and generalist though the letters seemed when I wrote them. But just as a drowning man would cling to a serpent, anything can force steaming urine down the thighs of a cornered tyrant. Dictators are like proud established heavyweight champions who dislike having to defend their crowns, and are petrified by the mere thought of losing to contenders. You

write, 'it's terrible, Charles. One can't cough any more without the secret police knocking on the door.' But I ask you, what did you expect? When were we ever free to cough? When was it ever okay for one to seek comfort in body and soul for the forgotten lot? Has the spear of persecution suffered indictment ever for its atrocities against the legitimate seekers of popular good?

"No, Monique, ours is and has always been a system where everything genuine and populist is frowned upon. Yes, a system where even personal letters pregnant with harmless innocence are treated as the poisoned swords of subversive dissent. Such is the cynical world of tyranny that we've borne for 30 years and more; a creepy world of fear and insecurity. The tyrant's phobias and inadequacies have placed the whole of society under siege. His paranoia is extreme, and his lack of trust in others total. In order that he might feel free, secure and at peace with his folie de grandeur, the rest of us have been shackled and deprived in the absolute. The price of his freedom to dictate is society's forfeiture of the freedom to resist.

"I wonder what must have pushed Mounjo into such confrontational rashness. What indiscretion could have sanctioned him with the sheepishness of wagging his tail in the nocturnal face of desperate hyenas? How

could he have chosen to play hide and seek with the vicious vipers of monolithic intolerance? A tyrant has the instincts of a bull in the ring, and can feel the mind of the amateur fighter like braille. He is particularly endangering when cornered. Your husband should have remembered this, and kept his calm and distance. Yes, Moungo should have watered his enthusiasm with cold ash. Perhaps naive excitement with the current goings-on in Eastern Europe fired him into the open mouth of his predator. I can almost imagine him reading my letters out to friends and fans with drunken endorsement, commenting with the lavish arrogance of the tactless critic, how the happenings of Eastern Europe justify his mentor in every way.

“Ah, poor Moungo! Naivety has always been his problem. This time it seems to have swept him off his feet into the land of the forgotten. Why didn’t he stop to think? Juste pour une petite minute! Why the excited rush towards free speech? Why did he lose grip of his tongue so suddenly? What could have blinded him to reality so easily? He should have remembered that a slave does not turn round and squeeze his master by the balls, simply because slaves elsewhere have squeezed their way unto Freedom. No, the slave with brains takes time to plan and execute his strategy with tact, for no two

situations are the same. Eastern Europe is Eastern Europe, and Africa, Africa. That's where I think your husband has disappointed me badly. Yes, most badly indeed.

"Oh yes, he really should have acted like the seasoned hunter who has learnt to harness with a single thrust of the spear. A wasp does not waste its sting on pre-fights, but waits for the real combat at the ripe time. Whatever his revulsion with the Chinese People's Army machine-gunning and mince-meating thousands of students assembled at Tiananmen Square to ask in peace for the right to open their mouths and air their beliefs; however spurred by the moral muscle of people power in Timisoara that brought the Ceausescus crashing beheaded into graves of shame and outrage; whatever the magnitude of his elation with the incredible suddenness of the shredding of the Berlin Curtain; and however fulfilling the election of a philosopher-king to champion democracy and freedom in a changing Czechoslovakia; your husband my friend Moungo, should still have maintained the calculative coolness of the puffadder. For the simple truth that no one pulls the trigger before he knows his target. You don't order a coffin made for a corpse you haven't yet seen.

"There's no denying that the injustices and tyrannical excesses which the students of

China wouldn't stomach, are nothing compared to the gross inhumanities of Les Rois Soleil d'Afrique. It's true that Africa is like a white garment soiled in a million spots by the blood-dripping festivities and fiendish cruelties of its notorious Ceausescus. And it's more than obvious that the need for revolution is greater in the Dark Continent than it ever was in Eastern Europe. But why your husband should choose to self-destruct, by taking upon the lightness of his shoulders the entire burden of a nation's cross, would baffle even the divine indulgence of the selfless Son-of-Man. The African ulcer is a chronic condition that calls for more than individual sacrifices. The cross is too heavy and the path to Calvary too long and thorny, for the single-minded enthusiasm of a lone crusader. It needs the collective energy of an entire people, one triggered by mass anger and fanned by international outrage. Moungo's error of judgment was to have thrown his lightweight on the empty and merciless altar of a god that preys on innocence and naivety. And the ferocious rapacity with which he was snatched, tells just what crocodiles of leaders we are blessed with! In the crushing jaws of tyranny, he must have felt little more than a beweeviled grain of wheat. Oppression thrives on a divided opposition. That, he should have

known. The blood of rashness is what makes Count Dracula live forever.

“Do not be deceived by pro-establishment demonstrations into thinking that your compatriots are content in their shackles. When people demonstrate in favour of a tyrant, it isn’t so much for his popularity than their fear for the worst. If only they could be sure that protest would lead to change, not fetters! Alas, they would rather endure the outrageous savagery of the tyranny that’s scorched them for three decades, than risk the waspy wrath of their oppressors with a leap in the dark under the banner of a sporadic, disunited opposition, whose messianic capabilities might be only in the mind. But in their heart of hearts, these dictators know the truth. Oh yes, they do. They know that decreed demonstrations have never been the measure of popularity. Just as they know that 100 per cent in the polls in a system wherein opposition is disallowed, does not fool even the brainwashed idiots of their choking regimes.

“Africans need a stronger sort of light out of the tunnelling darkness of their forsaken continent. The time has come to quench a thirst long ignored; the thirst to be liberated from the dictatorial complacencies, endemic corruption and suffocating mediocrities resultant from an unholy implementation of a very saintly idea –

monopartyism. The Saintliness in monopartyism has been stated and restated, not least by those who have sought monopartyism as a passport for dictatorial excesses. No one would in principle deny that total unity – such as promised by monopartyism – is better than the divisiveness inherent in multi-partyism, and therefore, to be sought by communities the world over; but few Africans are ready to make any more sacrifices for a cause the merits of which are only on paper or in the mind. Since independence, power-mad dictators have hidden under the cloudy nebulous of national development and stability to freeze all forms of opposition. But how much longer are Africans going to compromise for phoney stability and elusive development? Today, the question is hardly any longer one of merits and demerits of mono or multi-partyism as philosophical ideals, but that of how in practice pluralism and popular democratic participation can be injected into the barrenness of the continent's political Saharas. Monopartyism has made the best promises for Africa, but failed to deliver even the ugliest minimum. If thirty years of sacrificed freedoms aren't time enough to have attained the promised land of unity, integration and betterment for all and sundry, then monopartyism is a problem, not a solution.

"African tribalism, by far the single greatest justification for monopartyism, is less real than mythical. This, I've always maintained. The authorities, like their colonial predecessors, have used tribalism mainly as a weapon of divide-and-rule. It can be said that instead of fighting to end it, our leaders have perpetuated the myth. While Arabs and Jews the world over would unite to conquer, we blacks have chosen to stay forever yoked by oppression and its perpetrators. "Tribalism is Africa's greatest disease," I've heard a thousand times over. As if to say, feelings of togetherness resulting from sameness of origin are peculiar to the Dark Continent.

"Just last night a prominent conservative French mayor advanced tribalism as the reason why monopartyism must not be tampered with in francophone Africa, despite the sweeping wind of change in Eastern Europe, and despite France's claim to the founding fathership of "Liberté, Egalité et Fraternité." France might harbour the Chinese Goddess of Democracy and broadcast clips of the shooting of the Ceausescus, but France would seldom allow African exiles to fight for openness in L'Afrique noire from French soil. Multi-party democracy is too advanced for the black man, the mayor affirmed. "Le nègre est trop tribaliste," he added, and was applauded by those to his right. Like Montesquieu the

political scientist of eighteenth century France, the mayor has no qualms prescribing and supporting scorching dictatorships in tropical Africa. Why, one might ask, is France this dissuasive about democratic pluralism in Africa, yet so keen to promote it in the multi-ethnic states of the ideological East? Is tribalism if at all, really all there is to it? Of course not. If French cultural and economic hegemony weren't an overriding factor, France wouldn't be this reluctant to give pluralism a chance where the centralized dictatorships the French helped set up at independence, have failed woefully. It is much easier for France to manipulate an Africa united by monopolyism than one divided by multi-partyism. On the one hand, there's only one group of persons to convince or beat, while on the other, the hurdles are simply too many for France's convenience. It is unlikely that in a multi-party state, all parties would look at France's pervasive involvement in Africa with sympathetic understanding. A prospect France would rather not contemplate.

"Thus it is clear as water from the spring that tribalism as a justification for misrule is indeed a strategy by the white man and his henchmen, to trace their economic and cultural paths in the darkness of the African jungles without getting entangled. Both the African in the bleeding ghettos of our cities

and the peasants in the forgotten villages, live their daily lives without tribalism. There's far more racism amongst ordinary Frenchmen and women than there is tribalism in Africa. When you see the Zulus axing one another with the savage violence of apartheid and its apologists, what tribalism is involved? Do you think Chadians genuinely love to slaughter one another? Do the Sudanese hate themselves as much as we are told? Are there really no ideological similarities in Mozambique amongst people born and bred in the same villages? Is Savimbi actually that different from Dos Santos? Who are the real faces behind these masks of rancour and fratricide? Why do we Africans allow ourselves to be used with such outrageous indignity?

"If tribalism is indeed what sets us at each other's throats, I can only sigh with relief that there isn't much evidence of tribalism in the daily interactions of ordinary Africans, rural and urban alike. Let me illustrate with the example of Cameroon where not less than 200 ethnic groups exist. Our cities, as you know, are full of people from various regions and groups. These different peoples share the same ghettos, buy from the same open markets, draw water from the same filthy taps and wells, endure the same pungency of rotten refuse abandoned on roadsides by busy mayors, ride the same gasping buses, watch

the same football matches, visit the same bars for their daily dosage of intoxication, and send their children to the same schools. When did a Bamileke ever decline to sell to an Ewondo because of tribalism? Has Moungo ever got thrown out of a bar, football match or bus, because he didn't share the same ethnic affinities with whomever? How many instances of tribalism-related scuffles, conflicts or whatever, have been recorded over the past thirty years? Very few, if any. Why, haven't you wondered, does tribalism only surface when it comes to politics and getting together to conquer a common enemy – injustice and exploitation? What does this tell you? That there is little scope for 'negative' tribalism in the lives of ordinary Cameroonians; I say negative because to suggest that all tribal or ethnic sentiments are necessarily divisive is utterly preposterous. But when we examine the public service and government related activities, what do we realize? That almost everything (appointments, jobs, contracts...) is conducted along tribal or ethnic lines. The government, rather than seeking to satisfy everybody (which, admittedly, is impossible in the stomach-centred politics of a goat-eating-where-it-is-tethered, given our meagre resources) has settled for a cut-and-thrust sort of divide-and-rule that makes more enemies than it does friends.

“Although drawn from the various ethnic groups, the ruling intelligentsia in Africa, thanks to their Westernised views and lifestyles, and thanks to the unanimous adoption of the stomach as their only political compass, have constituted themselves into a separate all-powerful ethnic group, the only one which practises negative tribalism. Take away from power the Westernised few, and there will be no tribalism as a danger in Africa. But since this is impossible, given the firm grip on society of the Westernised few, the only solution is to set the évolués at each other’s throats through adopting the politics of division epitomised by multi-partyism. In advocating this, I’m not to be seen to endorse the view that multi-partyism would necessarily solve Africa’s problems; but in a continent where the intelligentsia have a greedy obsession for high-office, they might well be given the absolute opportunity to self-destruct. It’s only in a divided Westernised few that the marginalised of ethnic Africa have a chance. Thus in a way, the Politics of Unity isn’t exactly what Africa needs at the moment. If monopartyism has had the privilege to fail for three decades, there’s no reason why its proponents should be too selfish to give multi-partyism a chance, if only to fail as well.

“Like Communism, monopartyism remains an ideal whose sweet attractions have

been corrupted and effaced by the acrid bitterness of our imperfections as humans; and just as Eastern Europeans have waved their final farewell to the inhumanities of Communism in practice, we in Africa must turn our backs to monopolyism until the day when God shall make saints of all sinners. Again, like the communist tyrants of Eastern Europe, the monopoly dictators of Africa would not freely give up the joys of being in power unopposed; they will fight to their last Securitite. Of this I'm dead sure. African leaders are like the Russian Rasputin; they die not from single bullet shots, and it's naive to think they might. They are fortified with amulets and Western vests; we need more than superguns to render them truly dead and buried. To succeed, the struggle to dismantle tyranny must be collective and well-coordinated. The roots of tyranny have buttressed the entire continent, and only the resolve and tactful persistence of a whole people would jolt the oppressive giants. After three decades of total monopoly, even the slow-starters amongst the continent's dictators have amassed formidable forces of repression. The lesson of Tiananmen Square must be clear to you by now: The People's Army, like the rottweiler, knows one master only - the people's enemy.

“But however entrenched, African tyranny today is like a candle in the storm. Its days are numbered in seconds, thanks to the goings-on in Eastern Europe, and thanks to the release from jail of Nelson Mandela. As champion of genuine freedom, democracy and justice for all (white and black, rich and poor, learned and illiterate, peasant and urbanite...), Mandela is bound to embarrass all the petty dictators of Africa who would like to embrace him as “one of our own.” With their present record of shame and abuse, the noble saint in Mandela can’t freely associate with these angels of darkness without being seen by God and man, to compromise the very principles for which he suffered twenty seven years of humiliation and imprisonment.

“Also, the candle of African tyranny can no longer resist the strong winds of change blowing televisually and by radio waves, from across the once impenetrable East. The sleeping continent is awakening to the democratic whistlings of impatience even amongst its own inhabitants, and it won’t be long before our final adieu with crucifixes to all those who for three decades and more, drank and bathed themselves in human blood. The odds are much against today’s tyrants. With the current decomposition of the Eastern bloc, and with the diminishing threat of Communism, America and its allies in the

West are most unlikely to continue their blind tolerance of Third World autocrats; with the Cold War buried, the West might want to make future aid to Africa contingent on multi-party democracy. Economically, Africa is sliding more and more into irrelevance, and sooner or later, there is bound to be a massive pull out by multinational capital as Eastern Europe proves more fertile ground for investments. In fact, the time has come when instead of denouncing neo-colonialism and multinationals, Africans would plead and beg and yearn for repossession by the Angels of Capital, but without avail. The bipolar politics of competing ideologies might have had scope for sympathy and moral obligations, but commercial capitalism has neither a conscience nor the urge for fruitless investments. The tyrants of Africa would see RED, should the West toughen its attitude. But what a pity that instead of the tyrant's blood watering our dusty path to Freedom, your husband's rashness has made of him an easy prey for venoms of oppression.

"Frightened by the sudden eruptions in the hitherto dormant mountains of Eastern European captivity and ideological bondage, and threatened by the consequent rumblings in the regimented stomachs of their own citizenry, the African overloads of darkness and misery are bound to get violently

defensive. They know only too well that when the going gets tough, the tough get going. A tyrant has got to do what a tyrant has got to do. Naturally, they would savage the people's demonstrations for freedom to breathe and cough at will with axes of brutality, and many an innocent life for sure would be lost in the bloody process. Brute force is the tyrant's only tongue; but it also is his greatest weakness, especially if the people are united in their desire to end misery and pain. If the people appear not to be deterred by the illusive gallantry of their threatened overloads, and if like Eastern Europeans they have the support of international radio and television in their hour of need, black tyranny won't live to smile the next bloody day.

“Particularly pressured and outmanoeuvred, some tyrants might, persuaded by greed and the manic thirst for power, attempt a tactical cling-on with generous promises of reform, better living standards and/or multi-partyism even. Such a ploy must deceive no one. Listen not to belated promises of reform and betterment; these are nothing but a tactic to cling onto the only thing they so well love - power and nicked riches. Did they have to wait for the sun of democratic freedom and popular participation to penetrate the political tunnels of entrenched Marxism-Leninism in Eastern Europe, to know

how much their greed and selfish ambitions have eclipsed the African? No! Let's be firm in our rejection of the black Ceausescus. 'No,' we must say again and again, tied together by a oneness of voice, 'the leopard changes never its spots. Down with Count Dracula and his clan of vampires. We've lost overmuch in blood and life. Now is time to right past wrongs!'

"And to their graves, sure as the sun will shine I am, we shall chase them, beheaded and dismembered so that the soiled face of humanity might once again vibrate with the rhythm of untainted beauty. Democracy is an attitude of mind, a way of life, a culture. It isn't and mustn't be used as a publicity gimmick by devils excellent in the horrid art of the absolute. Nor is it practicable as a sudden adoption by cornered tyranny. No boxer threatened by a knockout asks the referee to suspend the fight until the day he feels strong enough to beat his opponent. The voice of the people must be allowed to flourish in its diversity of tones and outlets. In the boxing ring of plural politics and democratic freedom, today's dark destroyers are well and truly cornered. Just how can they come out of it alive, let alone victorious, if we the frustrated runners-up of darkness fight as a team united in spirit and purpose? And if the moneylenders of the West are no longer keen to finance their repressions?

“Thus, mind not the violent clampdown, and hope in prayer that your husband doesn’t rot in jail. What we are witnessing are the signs of a crumbling system, one deaf and blind to the needs and wishes of our people. One in which the stomach has for thirty years been the only political compass. The violence and bloodshed show the tyrant as cornered and desperate, and with a little more effort and coordination on our part, tyranny would have met its Waterloo. Whenever the rays of change do at last penetrate the darkening thickness of our suffocating jungles, it shall be the result of a massive all-involving effort, the fruit of our collective suffering.

“Like you, my only prayer at the moment is that Moungo escapes the last sacrament normally reserved for dissident prisoners of a particularly poisonous kind. Let’s hope that life imprisonment is his worst fate and that no designs exist, open or close, to doctor his meals and speed his death. Only in this way could we hope to make him part of the celebration that is bound to be ours sooner or later. When tyranny is ousted by people power, the iron gates of the Bastille would swing open and spill out in thousands the living martyrs of our hard-won freedoms. And as sure as the sun will shine I am, your husband shall be one of them.

"Therefore keep the candle of hope burning. Despair not, but pray to the Lord. With the turn things are taking, not even the prophets of doom can deny us the last laugh.

"Cheer up, and see you soon.

"Yours cordially,

"Charles "

What a ridiculous dream, I say. I've never had better proof that the world of dreams is a world of fantasy that breeds infinite improbabilities. Nothing ever seems too big or too improbable for a dream. Examined in the light of day and reality, the dream makes me laugh more than anything. Imagine an accomplished coward like yourself, one who wouldn't dare to cough louder than his doorstep. Imagine you being tried for sabotage and high treason! Just imagine that! Seen live on TV even, I would still think someone was pulling my leg. You simply are not the wood of which martyrdom is carved. Subvert-able you sure are, but definitely not a subversive.

But my dream wasn't entirely unfounded. I know it must be a premonition of some kind. There are bound to be clamours for change, and casualties are bound to abound. But such is the violent storm that precedes the fall of a giant tree. But whoever is going to get crushed by the crashing giant, I could almost

bet my life you sure won't be one of them. You are of the chicken-hearted brainwashed lot, whose only concern hasn't the remotest connection with politics, but all to do with booze.

You and your lot sure are critical. I don't deny that. But it's not the sort of critical-mindedness that threatens the stifling mediocrity of Africa's hellish systems. You may shout and bite your finger about the rising cost of booze, about low pay and about corruption in high office, but no more. Your problems are personal, so are your concerns. You've never learnt to stretch your feelers beyond the immediacy of your own hunting ground. But martyrs are not marked by such narrow interests and concerns. They rise well above the personal and immediate, and are capable of seeing, feeling and fighting at a pedestal far beyond matters of daily bread and butter. They question the fundamentals of the stifling order, and deplore the political and ideological deceptions that nourish its injustices and insensitivities. That, my dear Mouno, is the difference between you and the martyr, the difference between the boozier and the thinker.

It's because I know you this much, that I have convinced myself you could never have been the subject of such nationwide focus as dreamt, and that you're probably going around with characteristic lackadaisicalness,

drinking, urinating in your pants and chasing after free women without the slightest sense of guilt or decency. But a friend is a friend, and I wouldn't throw you to the wolves for all the world. Only, you must try not to overindulge to the point of forcing Monique to fly by night...

For all I know, you may not have heard in detail about the turmoil in Eastern Europe. Not necessarily because of government attempts to filter or suppress information, but because of your cultivated disinclination to dig to the roots of things that matter. However, committed as I am to our friendship, I would rather you knew too much than too little. So I have decided to tell you, with uncharacteristic to-the-pointness, of all that has left commentators lost for words in recent months. But first, it's only appropriate that I satisfy your curiosity by saying what for the Devil's sake I'm doing in hospital, and why on earth I'm still in Her Majesty's Queendom.

How apt the saying that Man plans and God disposes! Three days after informing you of my intention to leave for Kinshasa, I applied for a Zairian visa and was told to wait for a week. I am still waiting. The Zairian week must be a string of years! In the meantime, I went to London and stayed at the Mandela Hotel, where I was once again in the privileged company of Thomson and Thomson, my

English pair of friends. The historic release of Nelson Mandela on February 11 coincided with my stay at the hotel. I recall the euphoria that swept across London on Mandela's release. The multitude at Trafalgar Square was larger than any biblical. The crowd chanted: "Nelson Mandela is out of jail, but apartheid lives on. How can we say Mandela is Free?" How apt, I thought.

Personally, my emotions were and remain mixed. At a surface level, I felt pleased that a man imprisoned for 28 years was free at last, free to grace his family with his paternal presence. Yes, at that level, I felt truly jubilant. But Mandela is larger than a family man; he is a leader. It was as a leader that he lost the token freedom of a black South African under apartheid, not as the family man. That's where I felt his release was not so fulfilling. It was as if a saint was being forced to prove himself a second time, to relive his struggles with the trials, sins, passions and tribulations, which had earned him his canonization. Even Christ, I think, would rather forfeit his God-the-Sonness than make a second trip to Calvary. Yes, Mandela the saint has been released into a warring beehive of systemic intrigue and fraternal violence. With what magic or charisma can he subdue apartheid, when the hypocrisies and ambitions of his fellows are there to mar his every effort? Were

this the age of miracles, he might beseech his warring lot to throw their rancour and weapons into the Cape of Good Hope, and be listened to. But how can he succeed when others have everything to gain from his failures? Don't you now see why I would have preferred him in jail than out of it to face the villainy of the derailed forces in the black struggle for racial redemption and equality? It's in black disunity that the white has always scored his easiest victories.

Shortly after Mandela's release, I suffered a sudden attack of malaria, and no hospital in London would admit me, apart from this aged memorial dedicated to Dr Livingstone, penetrator of darkness. I've been lying here for weeks, waiting to be cured and released, and waiting to be lucky to go to Zaire. Only when these things happen, can I consider myself a free man again. There's a saying that one's smell always precedes one. I only hope my he-goat pungency has not affected my being granted the visa I seek. If I weren't locked up here like a guinea-pig, I would know for sure what the hell is going on. However, if I don't succeed to Zaire in the next month or two, I would be in Cameroon before you know it. Mission ratée! And African Philosophy, my dear Mounjo, like many things negro-dark, would have died in prematurity.

Where do I start with what? Never in my short life of youthful controversy have I been overwhelmed by such a rapid succession of history-making occurrences as the dethronement of the ideological chieftaincies of the lands of Marx and Lenin. Crashing down came the tragic cults of personality that for several decades had made breathing impossible for many an Eastern European and imposed a rigid monolithic order of bitterness for the masses, at the same time as a nepotic few wallowed in elastic hedonism. In a wink, the world's geopolitical atlas had been destroyed, and the cracks in the map of Europe mended by the will of a people determined to be free for real. Believe me when I say this was one of the rare times that Western leaders and political analysts were caught with their pants down. For the very first time since the Second World War, history was being made by the people, not their leaders. That's why these leaders and analysts were lost for words. Eastern Europe had taken them all by surprise. And what a surprise this was! For weeks neither the weaver-birds of North America nor the woodpeckers of Western Europe, could make head or tail of the goings-on. And when at last they found their voices, the best they could say was to declare Marxism dead, as if Marxism, proprement dit, had ever lived.

The spiral of radical change started in Poland like the peremptory flashes of lightning that precede a thunderous outburst, then spread through the neighbourhood like the wildness of a dry season blaze. Before the world knew what was happening, the ideological bullies of Warsaw and Budapest, East Berlin and Prague, had started to drop out of office like mosquitoes crippled by a potent insecticide. In Bucharest, the Ceausescus refused to listen when it mattered; they chose to spill innocent blood instead, and so lost their crowns and lost their lives as well. Today, sitting in Limbo as I presume they must be, the Ceausescus for sure would wish they had played along with public demands and bowed out in honour and dignity. In preferring mass slaughter to mass freedom, the Ceausescus were walking the delicate path of tanks and machine-guns traced by the ruthless gerontocrats of Communist China, when the June before they deployed troops with instructions to crush in thousands, students attempting their mouths to unzip...

Ah, dear Mounjo. I feel pain in my joints again. An Excruciating pain indeed. That's what I go through a million times a day. "Why do these people make malaria appear bigger than it really is?" I've asked myself a thousand times without an answer. For centuries, we in Africa have survived bouts of

malaria without having to visit the hospital each time it strikes. Here, on the slightest complaint, you are rushed to hospital and blood samples drawn off your veins. Then you are told to lie down and relax in waiting. For how long am I to continue to wait in this repulsive memorial? When I came here the first day, I told the doctor what I was suffering from and what I believed would cure me. "Quinimax, Flavoquine or anything in that family," I said. But the doctor wouldn't listen to me. He insisted tests had to be done. What for, I wondered. Since then, tests have followed tests, but I still have to be given a prescription that cures.

In Douala, you know, I wouldn't have bothered going to the hospital. I would simply have taken a walk down one rond-point or another and bought one or the other of the sunbaked tablets the hawkers retail, and that would have done the trick. Can you imagine how overcrowded our hospitals would be, were our doctors to insist on every VD or malaria patient taking a bed to wait for test results? The problem here is that there are more doctors and hospitals than the country knows what to do with.

With this pain, I don't think I can write for long. And what a pity! For it was my intention to tell you the A-Z of recent happenings, starting with the Tiananmen

Square massacres and going through the Eastern European revolutions, to end with a positive note for Africa – Namibia's independence and Mandela's release as symbols of Freedom to Come for Africa. But if you are interested to know in detail the demise of Eastern European autocracies and the cracks on the walls of apartheid since the un-jailing of Imprisoned Freedom, I would advise you to visit the British Council, American and French libraries in Douala, and read the massive coverage in the quality dailies, weeklies and monthlies published here in the West.

However, I must try and tell you about the final days of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu, alias Mr and Mrs Butcher of Bucharest. These two had a lot in common with the butchers of Africa, who must now be trembling and pissing in their pants; for the downfall of one butcher is an ill-omen for butchers everywhere. Butchers of Africa are unlikely to end otherwise should their current hungering and thirsting for absolute power persist.

Mr and Mrs Butcher of Bucharest were a tragic pair ordained from the outset to die in violence. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, violence to violence. A Tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye, blood for blood. He that attains power by the bullet, loses power by the bullet. That's the law of OBTDA (One Bad Turn Deserves Another). Like the butchers of China, they

went for the soldier and the bullet, when their people asked for a piece of meat and a loaf of bread, and for a bit of fresh air to breathe. They would neither listen to the children crying out for milk and love in the wilting arms of their queuing destitute mothers, nor show compunction with parents who saw no point in making children they could neither feed nor clothe. Orphans they needed in thousands to join their guards, for, as their ideo-psychologists maintained, only in orphans could the Butchers find the loyal blindness they sought. For 24 years, Romanians could go against the laws of nature, but never against the Butchers of Bucharest. This, they knew just too well ever to dare.

In many ways, the Butchers of Bucharest were very much like their African brothers in crime. Ceausescu was nothing short of a sun king, and Elena no different from the French peacock queen of Austrian descent. In typical fashion, Ceausescu held all major positions in his state and government. He was Secretary-General of the Communist Party, Head of State and Government, President of the State Council, Chairman of the National Defence Council and head of the Supreme Council for Socio-Economic Development. Pictures of him were hung in every household, every square, every school in Romania. When the people said "Our Father,"

it was Ceausescu they meant, not God; and when they hailed "Our Mother" or bowed to "Doamna," it was Elena, not Mary. Like their African partners in tyranny, they ensured that all rivals were silenced with overwhelming bureaucracy and threatening calls for monolithic loyalty, imprisoned, forced into exile or brutally eliminated. Thus giving the paternalistic impression that they and only they knew what was right for Romanians.

Nepotism was rife, with no less than 30 family members of his in positions of penultimate influence. Their son Nicu and daughter Zoia were spoiled with excessive attention and generosity. When both were arrested after their parents' tragic loss of control, Zoia is reported to have asked the police: "Is there room in your truck for my poodles?" While an army colonel is said to have posed for historic photographs in Nicu's HollyWood-style mansion where there were scores of suits, cutlery of silver and 24 carat gold, specially commissioned whiskies flown from Scotland, anti-aging charms and amulets of Chinese design and make, and bedrooms of Bondlike luxury.

Countless songs and poems were forged to chant Ceausescu's praises, by a people forced to perceive him as the "Founding Father of Modern Rumania," treat him as one of "the outstanding political

personalities of the modern world," address him as "the ideal incarnation of the most noble virtues of the whole people," and read newspapers covered from page to page with photographs and speeches of him. Elena his wife was even more megalomaniac. She had schemed to marry him, and on succeeding, had wriggled her way rapidly up the rungs of the Romanian hierarchies of power and ideas. Soon she had become the second in command in almost every aspect of Romanian life, although in reality, she was indeed the she-devil behind most evil during their reign of terror. She had an insatiable appetite for academia, and enjoyed a running-stomach of honorary degrees often devoured without university consent. She was greatly despised, but no one, not even her husband's brothers, could dare to say the truth.

The Ceausescus' fears and insecurities simply bordered on the psychotic. They wouldn't eat a thing, unless this had been prepared by trusted cooks and tasted by professional food-tasters. Neither Nicolae nor Elena would wear a suit or dress twice, not because of their proven obsession with glamour, but because they feared the powdery poisons would-be assassins might sprinkle on them. The amount they allegedly spent on use-and-burn clothes during twenty-four years of misrule is today estimated

enough to feed thousands of AIDS ridden orphans in Timisoara for two years and more. They were rumoured to wash their hands in alcohol after every handshake, and to avoid contact with anyone infected in any way.

Like most leaders African, the distinction between their personal fortune and the commonwealth was a very thin line. He, Elena, their children and nepotic associates were thought to have no less than £250m in gold banked in Zurich. Their love for the good life was royal and their goods mostly Western, but their ideology was firmly Eastern. They drank French champagnes and watched 'Kojak', but swore in the name of Marx and Lenin. They had a secret love affair with pinball machines and adored swimming in sea-side pools of red-coloured water, and, believe it or not, they had at one time seriously considered an offer of magical protection from many an African patriarch. Could African amulets and charms really have saved their lives, had they not turned these down for cultural reasons? I don't think so. To think this would be to concede that such magic could help the African tyrants stay in power. There is simply no magic, no matter its potency, to stop an angered people from crushing the tyranny that has belittled and overburdened them for decades.

Nothing can beat the resolve of a people who believe they've had enough of a tyrant. And it came to pass that not even the almighty Ceausescan Securitates were able to crush the angered demonstrators of Timisoara and Bucharest. Threatened by the demonstrations, Ceausescu turned the streets into a sea of green, as his commanders-in-chief responded to his orders to teach ordinary Rumanians a lesson in tyranny. Only the Peking gerontocrats expressed open support for him, but it's possible the butchers of Africa prayed and hoped for him to triumph, just as they had prayed and hoped for, then shared a drink with their wives and nepotic associates, when the Chinese gerontocrats gave the Peking students a bloody thorough mincing at Tiananmen Square.

As an indication to what lengths Ceausescu and his henchmen would go, when the international community, outraged by the massacres in Timisoara and Bucharest, pleaded with him to spare innocent children his atrocities, Ceausescu replied in very Dracula-like fashion: "If they are old enough to bleed, they are old enough to be butchered." But as fate would have it, he wasn't too fortunate himself. The forces of change soon rounded up on him and his wife, and a speedy trial and execution followed. Twenty-four years as an absolute tyrant had probably led to

feelings of invincibility on his part. So incredulous and condescending of the court proceedings were he and his wife, that they grossly underestimated the gravity of their situation. Ceausescu is reported to have stayed smilingly calm and defiant: "You can shoot us if you like," he told the military tribunal, "but we do not recognise you as a court." Elena, in her grande-dame style, wore a face of snobbery throughout, accusing the soldiers of unpardonable disloyalty to the Mother and Father of the Nation. "I was like a mother to you," she told them. "What sort of a mother were you, who killed our mothers and slaughtered our children?" they retorted. Realising nothing would change their fate, the Butchers faked courage: "We want to die together," Elena told the executioner. "We do not want mercy," she added, and her husband patted her leg in place of the kiss of life she needed.

And so the Ceausescus passed away in befittingly ignominious fashion. But given their crimes, there were Rumanians who cried out for more. "He should have been stripped naked, and his body paraded through the streets," some said of the Father Superior of Romanian Communism. Others asked for their bodies to be dismembered and displayed in museums the country over. But there wasn't a need for that; the fact was, Rumanians had

shown that tyranny can be crushed by the resolve of a people who believe they've borne too much. Romanians and Africans, I must warn, as always I've taken time to before disaster strikes, should remember that a society of complacent complicity, rumours, intrigue, lies, corruption, mediocrity, repression and whatever, does not get transformed by the mere elimination of the standard-bearer. The tree of Romanian tyranny has been pruned, not uprooted. Old practices die hard, and a conscious, sustained effort must be made to stop any changing society sliding back into its old ways. A word to a wise African is enough. God bless you.

But beware! Change comes never without its side-effects. Man lives not by love alone, but also by hatred. Inasmuch as the end of the Cold War promises Africa's repressed masses better access to Freedom and Democracy, it must not blind us to the fact that the world's nations will find new outlets for their hatreds. Until now, the bipolar world of superpower politics satisfied these instincts mainly along ideological lines, with Capitalism and Communism uniting or dividing states according to preferences and inclinations. Today, people have got to find new enemies, which isn't easy. The risk being that people might quite easily relapse into old-fashion RACISM. There are already signs of this in

France, Britain and Italy, where Jews and Africans have been singled out for xenophobic violence and outrages. We might not tolerate the resurgence of racism, but we can't claim not to understand it. The truth is, people have simply got to have something they fear, for people are united more by FEAR than by LOVE. For over three decades, the Cold War performed the strategic, largely non-violent balancing act between our conflicting emotions of love and hate. The question is, can the world afford to go without the peaceful tension that only the Cold War could have made possible? Can the world cope with rising xenophobia and violent racism? These questions are urgent and must be answered, but not at the expense of Freedom and Democracy.

I must end here. I can see the nurse coming through the door to attend to me. She will offer to post this letter even before I ask her. That's what she is paid for, I suppose, to be kind to patients, particularly Africans plagued by the very tropical ailments that made Livingstone depart before he had healed Africa, "this open sore of the world." But you can be sure that I wouldn't like to die before I've finished my task. And so like Livingstone I pledge: "Nothing earthly will make me give up my work in despair. I encourage myself in the Lord my God, and go forward." God bless, and see you soon I will.

Yours sincerely,

Charles.

PART FIVE

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Dear Readers,
The letters you've just read were addressed to me, Franglotus Moungo. It is true I promised Charles never to share them with others, but things are changing and a lot has happened to force me to rethink my undertaking.

Charles got well and was eventually granted a visa to travel to Zaire. But not before he had told a few lies to hide his true motives. The Zairians would never have granted him a visa had they known his deep concern for the African people suppressed by an uncaring leadership. But his stay in Kinshasa was not long. Mobutu's forces of repression caught up with him even before he had time to unpack his cases, take a shower and pay the University of Kinshasa a first visit.

At the N'Djili International Airport where he landed, a mammoth crowd had gathered to welcome an opposition leader returning from twenty-five years of exile in Belgium. In fact, he had shared the same Sabena flight with the freedom fighter. What looked like a blessing and a source of pride at

first, turned out a most unfortunate coincidence. Mobutu would not stomach the stubborn and triumphant return of a radical opponent. So he unleashed his dogs of war, and the airport was invaded with bullets, grenades, tear gas and looters. My dear friend and countryman didn't even have time to sigh: "Such a bad experience never again." He lost an arm in the process. He lost his personal effects as well, to Mobutu's hounds of repression. And was just lucky enough to leave Zaire half dead.

In Cameroon, Charles spent three weeks at the Laquintini Hospital where his left arm was amputated and healed. My family and I took care of him until he was well. We were thinking of how to help him get a job, when the Yondo Black (Douala Ten) trials came and got him all excited and involved. To him, his dream in England had come true, and the fact that it was Yondo Black not me as victim was a minor detail. He got himself too involved for my liking and for his health. But Charles is Charles. Nothing I said would tickle his ears. So I left him to his own devices.

Soon after Yondo Black and his fellow 'subversives' were tried and sentenced by the Military Tribunal in Yaounde, came the launching of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) party. Charles knew jolly well that the government was rattled, and that its armed

forces would do all to stifle any attempt at genuine change. But just like the SDF, he stubbornly went ahead to do what his conscience dictated. He left for Bamenda. Nothing Monique and I said, or did in tears, would change a thing.

In Bamenda on May 26, 1990, he was witness to Ni John Fru Ndi's brave rebuff of monolithic excellence and scaremongering. But again, he wasn't so lucky. Charles has seldom been a lucky fellow. The forces raided. Six died. Hundreds were injured. Charles seriously. He lost an arm, the other. He was hospitalised in Bamenda until the stump was healed. Then he left and came to stay with us in Douala, again.

For a year he observed the political evolution of Cameroon and Africa with anxious interest. Little pleased him. He found goodwill and genuine commitment to collective betterment neither with that in power, nor with those seeking the takeovers. It seemed as though the general concern of the opposition parties was to substitute the ruling stomachs, and not the redistribution of the national cake. "It is the war of the stomachs," Charles once remarked, in bitterness. "Their quarrel," he observed, referring to the opposition, "is with the eaters, not with the eating." He saw decriers of malpractice in high

office by the opposition as mere political gimmicks.

Charles was more than disillusioned. He had studied the national executive of each and every political party legalised and operated in Cameroon since the wave of openness in December 1990, and had found that not a single one of them, not even the parties that claimed to represent the aspirations of the common folks, had an illiterate peasant in the ranks of decision makers. How could this be possible, with 65 per cent of the population rural, and 45 per cent totally illiterate? For three days he wouldn't eat, but would only drink beer. Only when Monique threatened to cut her finger in protest did he decide to have some food.

A week after the March 1, 1992 legislative elections in Cameroon, he couldn't stand the hypocrisy, double standards and trickery of the ruling elite any longer. He disclosed to Monique and I that he had decided to conduct the fight from the only angle he believed true change was possible. The following day he would be leaving for Menchum Division in the North West Province. There he planned to live and work with the resettled but forgotten victims of the 1986 Lake Nyos Disaster. It was important for them, as peasants, to know and assume their responsibility as messengers of change, the

only hope for a better and caring Africa. He had lost faith, completely, in the modern power elite. A new sort of leader had to be moulded for Africa, and as far as he was concerned, the peasants offered the best hope in that connection, the Westernised urban-centred few having shown that they were not an answer, but Africa's problem.

And so he left. I have not heard much from him again, but reports that trickle out of Menchum say he is working really hard. He is revolutionising the peasants with his ideas. Some say that the peasants have started speaking out for themselves, asking questions that embarrass the enriched and empowered. But Charles says he is only beginning and that when his work is done, our elitist model of democracy, freedom, justice and power or whatever shall have met its Waterloo. Very like Charles, I daresay.

And so I decided to publish his letters, that you who hear and marvel about his activities amongst the peasants of Menchum might understand him better. His commitment has always been to the cause of the powerless and the overburdened. As he observed in his first letter, "The peasants are far more endowed than we have ever had the patience and humility to recognize, and I fear that by the time the Masked Dancers think of doing so, it may be too late." I think he waited too long

for the "most pathetic position" of the African peasant to be improved upon. And when the winds of democracy swept across the world, he thought, illusively, that the African power elite would take advantage of it and change for the better. How mistaken! How naive!

In Menchum Division he is fighting that the peasant who "toils under the sun, moon and stars, like Jimmy Cliff's slave-parents did, in order to sustain the urban centres with their bunches of consumerist civil servants and professional idlers" might assume his rightful place on the table of freedom and justice. He is out to destroy once and for all the myth of "noble savage" and to earn respect for the peasants not as custodians of "traditional dances" and "recreational savagery," but as the veritable pillars of the African economy, without whom the ruling minority would starve to death. So he teaches the peasants how to make political and economic capital out of their sweat and toil, and out of the ignorance and lazy habits of their urban-centred overloads.

And it is for these reasons, dear readers, that I broke my promise to a friend at heart. I thought Charles had something to share with more than just a friend. It is my hope and wish that some of you might be inspired to work along similar lines, and that one day the situation will be well and truly better for the

downtrodden and the forgotten bulk of our
Darkened Continent. God bless.

Yours sincerely,

Franglotus Moungo

This humorous tale of the naïve and curious African student-cum-philosopher wandering between North and South, the rural and the urban, has been in gestation for a period of nearly two decades. With allusion to traditions of the philosophical novel and the picaresque, Nyamnjoh's protagonist travels from his African village to the sharply divided and socially cruel world of 1980s Britain. By casting aside his disillusion and the traps of servitude and victimhood, *The Disillusioned African* reveals his creative potential for curiosity and adventure. He brings a bird's eye view, always affectionate, gently mocking, to the cultural idiosyncrasies of the new world he encounters, which throws his own African culture, politics and socio-economic realities into light relief.



'Whatever the imagined future for Africa, this courageous book will certainly provide, for both its foreign readers and the young generation of Cameroonians, a provocative insight into the complex web of despair, frustration, paradox and hope ... on the eve of the 21st century.'

- Louise Cuming, Catholic University of Central Africa

'In his characteristically humorous style, Nyamnjoh portrays the various social ills in society and castigates the political elite he holds largely responsible.'

- Piet Konings, African Studies Centre, Leiden, The Netherlands

'Francis Nyamnjoh ... has a particular way of saying very serious things in the most unserious manner. He entertains, and in the process he moralises, he teaches, he gives you lessons... learning experience and philosophy to give you a view of the dilemma of the African.'

- Sammy Beban Chumbow, Professor of Linguistics, University of Yaounde I



Francis B. Nyamnjoh is Associate Professor and Head of Publications and Dissemination with the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). He has published two other novels, *Mind Searching* (1991) and *A Nose for Money* (2006), and a play, *The Convert* (2003). His latest creative work is the book of short stories for young adults, *Stories from Abakwa* (2007).



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